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the watermark

a journal of the arts

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The Watermark is a journal of arts and literature published annually by the University of Massachusetts, Boston. The journal is operated by a staff of students dedicated to publishing the highest quality poetry, fiction, non-fiction, and visual art by the University's undergraduate and graduate student bodies.

Selections for publication have been reviewed anonymously. Information about submitting or getting involved can be found on our website, in person at our office on the 2nd floor of the UMB Campus Center, or by email. The journal holds North American first-time serial rights to published pieces only, and copyrights remain with the authors and artists.

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About Our Awards and Award Winners

Chet Frederick Fiction Award

The Chet Frederick Fiction Award honors the best work of fiction published in each issue. Former UMB English professor K.C. "Chet Frederick is both a poet and a novelist. Mr. Frederick has received numerous awards, including a 1993 fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. He has contributed short stories to publications such as *Epoch, Shenandoah, Kansas Quarterly, Ascent,* and *Ohio Review*.

Our 2009 judge, Steven Wingate, is a UMB graduate who received his M.F.A from Florida State University. He was the winner of the 2007 Katharine Bakeless Nason Prize in Fiction from the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference. His work has been printed in *Gulf Coast, The Journal Mississippi Review, The Pinch, River City, Green Hills Literary Lantern*, and elsewhere. He is currently teaching at the University of Colorado, Boulder. He is the author of *Wife Shopping*, a collection of sweet, funny stories published by Mariner Books, an imprint of Houghton Mifflin. He wrote about this year's winner, Nick Carter's *At Bay*: "It had a strong sense of movement, and excellent little details in resonant places."

Donald E. Cookson Non-Fiction Award

The Donald E. Cookson Award honors the best work of non-fiction published in each issue. The award was named for a man with an abiding love of all types of prose. Mr. Cookson has been a sportswriter in both Massachusetts and Maine, as well as a cartoonist, an educator, an insurance executive, a marketing guru, and a salesman. The award was endowed by friends, colleagues, and family, to honor a life dedicated to education and excellence in the literature.

Our judge, Professor Sally Haslanger of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where she specializes in metaphysics, epistemology, and feminist theory. She received her Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley. She has published three books: *Persistence: Contemporary Readings* (co-edited with Roxanne Marie Kurtz), MIT Press, 2006; *Adoption Matters: Philosophical and Feminist Essays* (co-edited with Charlotte Witt), Cornell University Press, 2005; and *Theorizing Feminisms* (co-edited with Elizabeth Hackett), Oxford University Press, 2005. She has also written articles for, among several other publications, *Philosophical Issues, Philosophical Perspectives,* and *Hypatia.*

Richard Yarde Art Award

The Richard Yarde Art Award honors the best work of visual art published in each issue. Richard Yarde has been a presence in the New England art world since the mid-1960s. Mr. Yarde trained generations of young artists at a succession of schools, and has been an art professor at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst since 1990. His paintings appear in public collections at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the National Museum of American Art at the Smithsonian, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Laura L. Montgomery earned her Bachelor's degree from the University of Massachusetts, Boston in 1982. She was an Art major and student government leader, and worked on student publications including the *Mass Media*. She was the founding arts editor of the campus literary magazine then called *Wavelength*. Montgomery received her M.F.A from the Massachusetts College of Art in '92. Her work has been included in exhibits at the Federal Reserve Bank, The Boston Public Library, Radcliffe College's Bunting Institute, Mobius, Boston City Hall, Mills Gallery, and The Artist's Foundation Gallery among others. Most notably her gallery affiliations in Boston have been with the Bring Your Own Art collective, Kingdom Fine Arts, Grand Central Arts at Central Congregational Church, and currently as Director of the Bunker Hill Community College art gallery where she has mounted more than 25 exhibitions in the last 5 years supporting the work of more than 500 individual artists. Montgomery is also an Adjunct Professor of Art History in the BHCC Visual and Media Arts Department. She called this year's award-winning entry, Noam Shabani's untitled photo, "A well considered and carefully composed photograph making excellent use of a naturally lit scene. The subject matter suggests a narrative and raises questions about the drama at the dinner table."

Martha Collins Poetry Award

The Martha Collins Poetry Award honors the best work of poetry in each issue. Ms. Collins established the Creative Writing program at UMB and currently holds the Pauline Delaney Chair in Creative Writing at Oberlin College. Her honors include fellowships from the National Endowment of the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, as well as three Pushcart Prizes. Collins is the author of a book-length poem, *Blue Font*, as well as four other books of poetry.

This year's judge, Robert Pinsky, is a poet and essayist and was the American Poet Laureate from 1997-2000. His several books in prose and verse include *Sadness and Happiness; An Explanation of America;* and *Democracy, Culture, and the Voice of Poetry*. He teaches Creative Writing at Boston University, and is Slate Magazine's poetry editor. He also founded The Favorite Poet Project, "dedicated to celebrating, documenting and encouraging poetry's role in Americans' lives."

Mestizo

Jason Cardona

"Ay, que lindo!" She did not pinch my cheeks,
but held them in a vise grip against her hands--
soft, warm, and worn. I smiled, and looked anywhere,
so as to avoid her stare. Her eyes would not move,
not until she saw the blue and white, and
the five stars in each eye. They had gathered
at the Ceiba tree to meet me.
The invalid,
the one my father had braced me to see,
her hijo, his hermano, my uncle.
The lawyer, whose penchant for stubborn argument
(a family trait) had made him a living. The two sisters,
wondering at their brother, whose life in America
now took a face. Missing was my abuelo,
whom I knew only as a passing reference
to a man run over by a car, dead.
There were cousins, too, a dozen or more,
welcoming me, a man who had been
a stranded exile. A little girl, however,
could not seem to recognize me.
She pulled me down by the chin, with the
same searching stare as my abuela, and asked me
who I was.
And my brown beard turned as white as my face.

LAWRENCE
GILLETTE

LAWRENCE
GILLETTE

what happened the week after Evan Wade died

By Jonathan Papas

what I did the week he died

(Mon). Shiv'ah .

On his way to ROTC, Evan was killed.

years of music, of tone flowing
between earholes and lips, forty
hours a week spent telling, distilling,
creating side by side, cannot prepare me for this.

I call on drink, I submit a pleading vocative
for gross Jewish gravy, but nothing helps. Somewhere
between Joseph Smith and yarmulkes he rests,
uncomfortably.

9 in the morning, over a gorge,

a gorge that people throw themselves
into once a year to escape higher learning-

he doesn't die by falling, he gets punctured

by a steering column

a lifetime spent talking in the
language of songbirds, in sound and vibrato, he couldn't
read this and he wouldn't
like it.

I shall write a poem that is masturbatory, one

that covers itself in grief. I will be undignified, I will not revise,
I will play loud, I will play fast,
I will fucking play the right thing1. I will be
so impenetrable that you cannot stop tapping your feet.

I spend a day in nostalgia, drinking
and making an ass of myself for
his memory, and it is not enough.
If I was more like him, I would be
polite, I would give you a moment of
beauty that makes it worthwhile, but
there is not a bottle dense enough

to sink this sorrow. There is

not a lyric I can give you to make it explicable. I spit

out this elegy: THERE IS NOTHING PROFOUND I CAN SAY ABOUT DEATH.

~

(Tues pt. A). A Suspendered Bartender Kicks Us Out of Oceania, the Bar in the Long Wharf Marriott.

"finish your drinks and go"

Suspenders, Knifey-Jeff would like a word with you

-"jack-ass night hates a drunkard, and jack-ass drunkard
hates a short night. nice suspenders."

like a butterfly knife in slow motion, he unfolds
and shows his fleshy underbelly, covered in eyes.
with glass shard hands he rips at corneas, bellowing

-he's just asserting his autonomy, says laughter, says phantom goatfoot, says kinesthetic man

just then a large eagle sweeps in, the one that will skull-fuck us with hang-overs,
rending flesh from suspendered bartenders. Jeff
chats 'er up, and they leave the bar in an explosion of

rose petals and sirens

~

(Tues pt. B). pissing in the ocean

while they go assess the possibilities of
stealing an ancient ocean vessel, I sit

sole parallel to water, humming quietly
to myself. I piss into the ocean for Evan, I

give the only thing that is wholly mine. I try to
sing, to give voice to this moment, and I fail, disgraced.

They come back, and all I have is this new, oldest thing:

three grown-ass men, racing, trying

to see who will win, spilling the only thing we
can ever claim, call ours, into the harbor.

~

(Wed-Thurs). Shiva: THE RECKONING

I watch Babylon 5 with Alex and
an alien accuses me of being
a moon-faced assassin of joy.

He visits me while I shave in
my dreams, tells me that I am dishonoring
an honorable man, that I am

a narcissist, that I am not addressing
the man that was. I take my razor
and split him down the middle

and fold him into a clarinet. I sit
in my bathtub crying, trying to play
the opening glissando from Rhapsody in Blue,

squeaking, tears and spit getting caught

on the hairs
in the drain.

~

(Fri pt. A). Blueberry Pie

the secret: a graham cracker crust,
with chunky blueberry life in between.

things one does on Halloween: listen to Thriller,
eat candy corn, decide to wear a hoodie instead
of a costume because you're too sad inside.

But all that is put aside, when she gives me
that goddamned blueberry pie

in the space between text and wireless
radiation, between ringtone spidersmoke,
where will we be able to sit, with
the sweetest southerner that ever was,
be bashful and eat pie

~

(Fri pt. B). Enormous Porch

Festooned in goat hooves, he beats out
a furious tune on a woodland platform.
A dead fire pit, a black wood, a scent
of gravestones and weed shuffling
through the leaves. When we first encounter
Lex dressed like Pan, he erupts from a
bar playing a jaunty tune, footloose, fancy-
free. His beard overflowing, his chest bare
to the late October chill. He makes me think
Jethro Tull, any Jethro Tull song.

We are his captive audience here, in a theatre
for trees, an auditorium for acorns. Dionysus
watches Pan from a distance – too many things,
beyond retelling. Artemis, that virgin godtwin -
fingering her arrows, triangulating her

aim. A drunken Pantheon.

There's a hole in me he fills
with booze and song, a tear
he cauterizes with a cigarette.
Beneath the stars, standing
around an invisible fire, talking
about all the things
none of us will do.

~

(Sat pt. A). Resting at the Feet of Giants

the darkness steals over sound like death,
aside from a spare flute song. lost, a closed
cemetery, a colostomy bag of sonic decay.
wrapped in the warming folds of alcohol's
attention, I fight the sentimental impulse
with the entire thrust of my being. I rest
on the bones of those gone before me,
surrounded by three without compare.

I am Shiva, Apollonian, remade in this bitter cold,

fashioned from gravestones, cloaked
in jangling xylophone bars. I lay at
the feet of Anne Sexton, reaching
out my hands, snuffing out stars.

~

(Sat pt. B). variations on a cemetery polyrhythm (sing it to yourself) (a few do's)

hitting hitting hitting hitting wecan'tfind hitting hitting hitting hitting e.e. cummings' grave! hitting hitting wecan'tfind hitting hitting marimba bench marimba bench marimba bench hitting hitting hitting e.e. cummings' grave! marimba bench marimba bench hit-ting hit-ting hit-ting wecan'tfind e.e. cummings' grave! hit-ting hitting hit-ting hitting wecan'tfind sam'ssobored wecan'tfind sam'ssobored marimba bench marimba bench hitting hitting hitting hitting hitting hitting wecan'tfind hitting hitting hitting hitting e.e. cummings` grave! marimba bench marimba bench.

~

(Sun). Shiva 3: Tulsi Lakshmi Leaf3

The name of god / must / be silent,
she says with leaves in her mouth, it must / cull divine
from sour milk, it / must / lop off / infection from flesh, it
must / be more / than grape-flavored / suffering.

~

(Mon). Because yes, in the end, it is all about art (sitting in class with Sam, singing EW's songs to myself)

It's a shame I have only
one life to live my art,
and only one art to choose.
I'd give it for you over and over again,

we could be like Florentino and Fermina, you
could be my lady and call me Al, but
there's been too much grief, and the good
is hidden, and JHVH keeps breaking

my poor potato heart,

and I could kill bitches with swords, and
you could throw some shit, but

I cannot cast off this sorrow, even after dissolving.
and I cannot forget, cannot help forgetting. but you,

you

were there, when no one else was.

but fuck all

that. you really, all, should, know-

I

would

kill

for

your

poetry.

a couple of birds

Jeffrey Taylor

I have a young she to goose and nudge.
Plenty of feather quilts tucked in a leather trunk.
Two swans live in our pond.
Donald and Natasha: both aggressive
as January, hissing
and nipping at bare hands.
I warm tea; and night
unfolds cautiously on the ridgeline,
into crabgrass whiskers, onto the porch,
where she, sleepy and blond, stretches
my cashmere sweater over her knee.
    She loves when I call our birds by name.
    Donald! Come out of that cove
    and eat these bread crusts!
Necking in tandem, the birds romance elusive
shadows spilt across quivering pond water.

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GILLETTE

Everybody Looks and Listens

Matt Duchaney

Talk about being an individual to somebody else.
My life is my Sun Dance and nothing extraordinary.
Examples of yesterday: the bass pulls another blue phrase
that the dunes carry off into eternity of Texas-red Sun-going-down,
dusky warmth where the girl is free and unafraid.
The dreams I have at night no longer ordinary.
Dozing off during the days, lucid trips, ups and downs,
fellaheen situations forgotten. Everyone's selling the bastard land.
I'm an individual in Mind-Everyone's-Business America.
You ask where's Turtle Island, unaware you are there.
I ask for Peltier and you have no idea.
Sheds on the rez and junkers in Canada won't explain
why we're still merlying around with plastics in our hands
and oil in our teeth and toxics on our skin and lips and hearts:
words are worse than dirt is better than a wage being
worse than dirt and no way to live;
far too many wait with patient eyes, sweating out Goya
and the very last bits of genetically-modified-free Maize.

Don't Let This Happen To You

Michael Whitten

I jump onto an empty elevator
(I'm so late for class!)
and the doors close before I realize:
Damn! Somebody farted in here.
— Beam me up, Scotty! —
Like I was sayin', I'm trapped
inside.
Next floor. The doors open again;
Oh-oh...
...the student body walks on,
the one I told myself I didn't care about
(Be cool: just keep your pie-hole shut!)
— Perception is reality —
You know the rest:
— I stink, therefore I am—
— "Christ, anybody can let one fly, fool,
But you could knock a buzzard off a shit-wagon!" —
I guess we won't be going
out
for coffee now.

greenly by a steam

Jeffrey Taylor

beth-face…smearing
mud into her hair.
it's not too tangled, beautiful.
so stop asking me. I play low D
on this worn blue guitar,
tuned down to sound like sea fog.
j.s. wanders around his high
E, so playfully. the pistol is on a stump.
someone has fired all the rounds into piles
of leaves and poplar bones. who brought this
wretched thing anyway?
    hey!
you…
dancing up in those rocks!
what have you done
with all the marijuana?

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GILLETTE

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Condemned

Angela Voras-Hills

Today, I built a house for us
from a red deck of cards.
The aristocrats faced
in, like portraits of the dead
hanging in our hallways.
(Your face
fiercely absent.) Some of our things (the down
comforter losing feathers
with each fluff before bed),
I moved here immediately. Others
(the couch your mom lay on
during her first
heart attack), I left behind
to be demolished.
From inside the scarlet tower,
I can see our old house—the men
with their wrecking balls
eating ham sandwiches and barbeque chips
while they steer
their steel spheres into our kitchen.
(I am waiting for you to tell them to stop.)
(If you have never seen
me so close to the sky, I urge
you to look now, before)
Our stove, now uncovered by walls,
stands alone, naked while passers-by
stare at the gap,
wondering where it leads.
The stove is embarrassed, scared:
they can tell what you made me
cook there—each night something
new until there was nothing new
left and (Are you still waiting?)
you didn't come home until you'd had your fill
of sushi, and bored, I roasted
your brown leather boot
like the ass of a steer, boiled your contact lenses

in their solution for soup,
and by the time you came home
tired from working so hard
at kissing some other woman's
ass and eating cosmopolitan dinners and
drinking corporate drinks, dinner was waiting patiently,
much like I am now.
The cake pan you threw at me is still
charred on the counter,
all the baby's photos baked
in a black negligee crust.
You will come back.
I know because
you cannot stay gone.
No matter how many
limbs you are missing,
no matter how many times your skin remembers the burning,
you will have to return for your heart,
calling for you from the oven.

A Forest vs. a Hedge Maze

Christopher O'Keeffe

The conversation fell upon
the relative superiority
of starlight to streetlights,
and hills to buildings.
I disagreed, seeing
something sexy and sinister
in a well-crafted bulb
with a finely twisted filament.
Chemotherapy, precisely designed,
unlike the creatures it fights,
is formations and vanguards;
fireworks stinging nature to remission.
Every cancer cell is a general,
a clawed hand, a chewing mouth,
or the gun it needs to be.
Its masses spread like gossip
in sharp, hungry webs.
But I prefer a cure,
straight like a passing lane,
silicon and brushed metal,
disciplined, well trained.
Hills happen. Buildings are made.

Drink Me Black

Shea Donovan Mullaney

Why do you water me down? Whiten me up?
Pour sugar down my throat?
I ain't sweet; ain't
yes ma'am, yessir, or any way
you like it.
        I'm your
mornings, your afternoons, your entire
                life roasted,
        &   coarse-ground: I sting
as I go down.
Look down at your boots;
see chicory; see I am deeper
than dilated pupil, darker than power outage.

A Weed

Jason Bedore

Mornings we'd cut grass and
lie with belly aches on the lawn.
This world isn't ours anymore,
think we, looking at ants pepper
Denali blades of grass.
Blistering morning gusts—
inhaling and exhaling—
breath a pulsing giant life.
But what could've upset our
poor bellies? We belly up to
shine. That sun could
push this point right here, two fingers
over from your navel, a palm place
under your ribcage.
What on Earth
could've caused this ache?

One Anonymous Night Together

Paul E. Morse

what matter
if night fumes
comatose with the
city so solitary .
lit with no
god as perilous
to its rats than
light even the
moon is a prowler
sitting on a hotel
windowsill balled-
up like dust
in a corner shaping
thousands who
have sat sit now
will sit there
as nervous the stars
for the rain
I wake for the
warmth of your
flesh watch you
with eyes un-
conscious
a neoned outline
a self-portrait, as
tender a gaze
for the years
  love, what matter
if life
end here

After They All Found Places to Sleep, You Remember:

Jason Bedore

Earth's animals were sheepish
creatures with maps, lost
once upon a time.

The Penny Man

Shea Donovan Mullaney

He looks as though he needs them,
but the old man doesn't pick the pennies
up from the sidewalk; he turns them
so that Abraham Lincoln faces the sky.
He pitches copper into the air
the way his friends throw birdseed;
he likes to be sómeone else's luck.
And I see on every fallen cent the face
of that threadbare penny man.

Small Box

Gregory Stenta

I placed my best underwear, loose
socks, my black suit
on the bed. It seemed you
were still there.
The small box I'd presented held
no charm for you.
You didn't gasp.
I remember you first emerged
from a new purple nightdress.
You saw me only as a jaguar,
good for pawing you, for pinning
you down.

The Darn Man

Dan Roche

Excitement surrounded the launching of the Expeditious, a steamboat, the first of such craft to leave the city's shores, from New London on March 15th, 1804. A chill, and sight drizzle, fore-stalled the appearances of many of the city's senior members, and so the day was given to the younger, the energetic lawyers in overcoats freshly issued from the universities, glistening sailors, damp and sullen-looking workmen and traders. There were several luminaries present, including Law of the House of Representatives, and the Federalist Governor, Trumbull, to witness this maiden voyage. The ship, seen as an innovation over the seedy little sloops that commonly split Long Island Sound, carried a cargo of ambergris, silver candlesticks, dry goods, and a few dozen of passengers, that included Beatrice Pershing, betrothed of Francis Shaw. The two had spent that morning with the very best smith in the city's busy jewelry trade, studying every careful stylizing whittle he made, trying not to distract him as he finished off their pieces. Francis was given hers, she his, for safe keeping until they met again.

At noon, she struck off to New York aboard Expeditious to gather her wedding trousseau. They waved, each surrounded by other wavers from the deck and from the pier. As soon as the passengers' faces grew indistinct, Shaw spun on his heels to turn back to his study, where an important draft laid waiting to be copied. A smaller document, no less vital, rested in the pocket at his breast. It was a note from Beatrice, who often communicated with him in rhyming couplets. It said:

Alack, my Love, must I presume
To see you when the Flowers bloom?
No - I drift to Dream, in when,
We two may ever meet again.

Shaw, a 26-year-old Yale graduate, a former legal apprentice of the eminent Seth Staples, had secured Pershing's berth aboard the ship with a favor owed. He did not regret extending himself so, but knew he would feel the burden of time while she was away most dearly. He suspected that he could not feel as if he knew what to do with himself until she returned, though in fact he would be quite busy. His work, though, would be only a diversion, not the indulgence, the window into the world and its fascinating troubles it was when he was pleased.

Their future was cast as carefully as the stone had been set in her ring: he

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would establish his practice representing commercial interests in New London from their home on the five-acre plot he had bought a little ways out, while she would continue to teach in New London's grammar school, as she had before they met. In their spare time, which they each could jealously defend from the encroachments of their careers, he would translate Cicero and Homer and she would compose her poems. He loved his city, saw in it a new Neapolis, and had brought back with him from New Haven the newest notions of the Continentals in addition to a classical training in syllogistic argumentation, and a scientific habit of mind. Though secretly an agnostic, he made the appropriate show of piety when propriety required it of him. He cherished to expose delusions and could be disputatious (though he preferred to persuade). He with his love Beatrice was pacific. They were a queer couple, one could say, he the scion of one of New London's first families and some, amongst themselves, considered her quite beneath him, looked at her as if she were stained with some additional original sin. There were rumors about the "legitimacy" of her birth started by certain ladies who themselves fancied Mr. Shaw, and since Beatrice's parents were of the same reclusive sort as she was these allegations went unchallenged and so were generally accepted by those predisposed to believe them.

He was broad-shouldered and tall, handsome, athletic, and kind-hearted, he had a charming rigorousness that made people enjoy him and feel that they were enjoyed back. It was not pushiness; he invigorated. He could make his determined adversaries laugh with him. He was multitalented, and in addition to his intellectual endowments was an adept at the violin and the piano, who spoke, in addition to English, Greek, Latin, French, German, Spanish, all fluently enough, and with Sanskrit a hobby. He saw a day when men of all nations would assemble for commerce in New London, and meant to converse with each of them in at least a common tongue if not their native one. Pershing, a school teacher, was older than he by two years, and quiet, spoke one language. She lived alone, cloistered in one of two close apartments over her school. The other was vacant, and though the door was unlocked Beatrice never ventured in it, though it had a window, which hers didn't, that could look out across the street to see the shops and a spire looming above them. The room didn't belong to her, she didn't belong in the room, thus she never went in. Her classes were uniformly quiet and busy, in natural accord with her gentle guidance. She was reasonable with and respectful to her students, and they reciprocated. Such a one would go unnoticed in most places, and in the busy port of New London she was almost forgotten altogether. So she observed. She wrote about what she saw in notebooks and whatever scraps of paper she could find upon inspiration, and these notes she kept stored in a shoe-box tied with twine.

They first met on the small green outside the New London Female Academy. She, struck a sudden itchy fit of inspiration, had fairly run into the school to gain a piece of paper. Producing a pencil from her bonnet, she fell onto the lawn and began to write. Shaw, who happened by, looked down at her amused.

He peered over her shoulder, unnoticed, and read what few words she had written in her sure penmanship.

Those who thought of her at all before she and Shaw had met saw one of those women who, with only perhaps a cat or some orphan taken in, would be perpetually engaged to the children she taught. She was his precise physical contrast, poorly complected, stocky and wheezy, dark where he was fair. They were mutually taken, in a way neither much analyzed. The love remained one thing in his life that hadn't been subjected to scrupulous examination.

The nuptials were planned upon a week of her return, itself in precisely a month. Francis would spend the next few weeks busy with workmen completing the house when he could steal away from work. He wove home through sailors, through old women selling biscuits that they were alternately trying to advertise to passersby and protect from the rain, and wayward band members. His betrothed was carefully replaced in his mind by the draft.

A boy padded down a dirt path to find a man burrowing in the dirt along the adjacent shoreline. The boy, curious, stopped short to ask the man why he dug.

"I fear that a ring of mine has been misplaced, one of inestimable value, Sir," the man responded.

"Do you need help finding it?" the boy asked.

"If young Master deigns to assist me I would be indebted," came the reply. "Before I am to wed, the ring must be found. I do this chore for someone very special to me, who is ashamed at its loss."

"I'll help you look until we find it."

"Very well. What would be your name?" he asked.

"Archibald."

The man put the name together in his head. "Let us dig, Archibald."

The boy peered at the man, wincing at the sun over the man's shoulder. "And your name, Sir?"

There was no answer. The man digressed to ask if there had been news regarding a ship called "Expeditious." There had been none that the boy knew about. They dug for hours in the riverbed, and the man dug methodically, like an archaeologist, while the boy, less careful, tore busily through the dirt. When the sun set they parted ways. "How long will you be looking?" the boy asked before they parted.

"Until the ring is found, and my bride may return," came the reply with a wan smile. Its speaker stood as if about to be felled, or an emotion had struck him that aged him further upon feeling it. He began to move along.

The man did not return the next day. Thereafter the boy dug by himself, eventually recruiting the aid of a pair of friends.

"Why are we digging?" one asked.

"The tall man I told you about needs help finding his ring."

"Why does he need his ring?"

"It belongs to him, he says, but his wife lost it while she was away and couldn't return out of embarrassment. Something."

"Sounds like a tale."

This seemed to the boy to be a distinct possibility. Before very long, his usual youthful pursuits eclipsed the urgency of the ring's retrieval, and the matter was forgotten.

Over time the man became widely known in the area and further along the Connecticut coastline, in southeastern New York, southwestern Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. He traveled a circuitous loop that took six months to complete. Farmers in their sitting hours entertained the notion of setting their agricultural tables by his comings and goings. He was at least as reliable as the zodiac. Children followed him too, throwing rocks and calling him "Dog Man," because as he made return bouts in many towns, dogs followed him like apostles and were not wild. They sniffed at his hand and nuzzled it with their heads, though he had nothing to offer them. "Dog Man heed, time to seed," they said in Cannan, where sweet peas and tomatoes were always sewn in his wake. Others would call him "dig-man" after his habits in looking for his ring. This name, which did not seem to fit his otherwise fastidious cleanliness, was soon dropped.

Everywhere, he asked after the whereabouts of a gold ring that had been lost. Sometimes the question came out sideways and escaped from him, like a bird he was trying to hide in his hand, when otherwise he was discussing stock-jobbing or horses. With people he was, not garrulous, but broadly befriended nonetheless. Within a few years a steady network of families allowed him overnight lodging. To observe his meticulous manners and engage in conversation with him was often felt to be payment enough for a meal or a place to stay in inclement weather. He insisted nonetheless on performing tasks in repayment for their kindnesses. He was difficult to dissuade. So, he would fill the wood box or tinker with broken tools or teach a lesson a while before requesting a needle and thread to darn the suit he wore. It was of the finest blue broadcloth, the jacket with split tails and the trousers well tailored. It was shone in spots, at the elbows and the broad part of the back. There was a gold watch with fob, and a silken top hat that was white at the time he first donned it, but had grown darker. The coat, in coming years, wore further and required patches in places, and this settled his identity as "Darning-Man," or the "Darn Man."

He spent the winter in his home outside New London, where he would mostly pace, agitated in anticipation of his bride's return, planning carefully how they would proceed with their new life, and what adjustments could be made to compensate for the squandered time. His family grew concerned after the state of his mind once it became plain that he could not be dissuaded, and an uncle left a sizable sum in his will to the continued maintenance of his nephew, who had estranged himself from most of his family, because they told him things he did not want to hear of.

"Ho, Darn Man!"

"Hello, Master Archibald. Time passes!" A year had turned since they'd last met and the same exchange, as a matter of formula, recurred.

"Have you heard any word about your bride?"

"Ah, she is lost to me still, but she will arrive presently."

Archibald asked, after a pause, "Have you given a thought that this might not be so?" The question was a novelty to their otherwise broad field of discussion. The Darn Man took it very seriously.

"She has gone to the city, and will return in due time. I am faithful. New York is a Babylon, she will loose herself."

"But I have heard news of the Expeditious."

"Oh?"

Archibald was a stevedore, and had heard about the fate of the ship from co-workers and their chatter, which was dominated by shipwrecks, whales, and women. She had sailed about a half a mile out of Bream Cove. Her crucial flaw was the boiler, which blown wide open from the stress placed upon it. The captain, himself making his maiden voyage, must not have known enough to stall as soon as he heard the desperate rattle coming from below deck, and probably thought he could power his way through the problem. The resulting explosion killed one-hundred and twelve.

"No such thing happened," said the elder man, crossly, "and if it please you, I request that you cease giving voice to falsehoods!"

A long silence passed between the two. The tall Darn Man then carried himself down the road, his shoulders bowed and face morbid. He was gauging the possibility that the man spoke from knowledge. It could have been. But a surging impetus bade him onward. If it were not true, his bride's discovery was always possible, and it was only a matter of searching to find her. If it were true, after all, life held nothing for him.

The forlorn man, who once held such boundless promise, now was only consumed by endless looking. His relations had passed on, or had forgotten him. His school fellows had gone on to excel in the world and its affairs. There were few where he traveled to recall his illustrious youth. The house planted on the tuft of lawn outside New London grew into decrepitude, betraying the distraction of its owner. His uncle's bequeathal dwindled.

In the winter months, his questing was arrested by the snow. This caused him anxiety beyond tolerability. These times were dominated by the drafting of a letter which had been written and re-written an incalculable number of times over the span of decades, and though its author felt that no words in any language ever spoken or written could convey the interior sense of what he wished to express, still he continued to write it.

He sat in the home of his longtime acquaintance. His face squinted, and his clothes resembled patchy quilting. Archibald, now long past his own youth, was

accompanied by his wife. Quite resigned to humoring his delusions, but still curious about him, about his motives, she could not help but try to tease out glimpses of his character that might provide enlightenment. She had learned several things. She knew he was particular about how his tea was prepared. She knew he was a beautiful violinist; Archibald's fiddle always found his hands faithfully soon after he arrived at their home. He made it sing most plaintively, as if giving a voice to some anguish that was very old, that many people knew, but that felt unique to all those who were stricken.

She knew not to offer to mend his clothes for him, but would anyhow: "These are my wedding clothes," he would say, "and they are sacred to me. My bride will be here soon."

"And what will you do once she appears?" she could not help but ask, once.

The question was met with silence. His plans had adapted so much with time, that to mention one brought more corollary considerations than he could entertain and conclude upon, coherently, in company. It was impossible, like asking him to provide the precise distance in terms of mileage from Earth to Heaven. He looked out the window and made a spire with his hands at his chin. Disorder arose in his mind that he could not put at ease. Outside, the rapid clips of a rushing horse's hooves were heard on the road. Through the clatter cut a peal of laughter, a young woman's.

"There she is! Here she comes! She has alit from the ship!" the man yelped as he bounded from his seat and dashed outdoors. He was wild-eyed, like he had discovered a new religion and electricity, both at once. "I am coming, Beatrice! Here I am, my little bride!"

The husband and wife scrambled after him. The horse's driver snapped the reins back. The charger reared and, whining, jabbed at the temple of the Darn Man who, moving like a much younger man, had lunged full tilt into the road. He was instantly killed.

He was returned home for burial. Upon dressing him for funeral, the undertakers initially intended to vest the man anew. His friends prevailed upon them to clean and mend the matrimonial garb he had worn for time out of mind.

The tailor found one of the few bits of fabric extant from the original suit, on the inside left breast. It was a tiny patch of silk to which was sewn many colored threads. A bit was contributed each time the suit had been repaired over the decades. This formed a cocoon around a scrap of paper that included two rhyming couplets, itself wrapping around a small gold ring, not quite large enough for the long-traveler's little finger, that bore a luminous emerald.

The Last Time We Spoke

Jon Clark

On the train over to Jackie's, I read a few pages of Lucky Jim even though I only travel one T stop. In Boston, there is no difference between going one stop and going five or six. Most of your time is spent on the walk from your house to the station and then from the station to wherever it is you're going. Each stop only adds a minute or two. So despite the short distance between Jackie's place and mine, it takes a half an hour. And since Forest Hills is the last T stop, you sit on the train for a while before it starts.

On the walk up Glen Road, I realize I haven't been here for a couple of weeks--and even then I was only passing through. The surroundings make me sad; the words "old stomping ground" pop into my head, but not because I ever say things like that, but because I'm feeling the way I imagine people feel when they say things like that. The corner of Washington and Green, I realize, is becoming my past.

I arrive at her house. She opens the door and heads straight back to her bedroom to finish getting ready. I take off my boots and my jacket and sit on the couch. On the coffee table sits *The Satanic Verses*, which I open to check what page Jackie's on. 442. Almost finished.

I walk back into Jackie's room and she's putting on eyeshadow.

"So, what're you doing tonight?"

"Going to see a movie. With Betsy from school."

"What movie?"

"We don't know yet. We're just gonna see what's playing."

She plays with her hair in the mirror.

"I wish my hair was longer."

"I think it looks good."

"Just a few more inches."

"Like that picture you sent me in Vegas."

"Longer. And blond, too."

"Blond, huh?"

She nods, smiling, doing this funny thing she does where she agrees, faux-pretentiously. We have these characters we do whenever we're telling a joke that requires us to pretend to be the people we are making fun of. They don't have names, but whenever we need to become them, they are remarkably consistent. Always the same voices, the same ignorant responses, the same mannerisms. This is one of our characters.

She walks into the bathroom to pee for probably the fourteenth time today.

I walk back into the living room. I pull out the bowl and clear it. Jackie's bag is sitting in front of me, so I pack it.

LAWRENCE GILLETTE

Jackie comes in.

"Here's your bowl," I say.

"Oh, great. Thanks. It'll only be for a couple weeks I promise. Only until school starts."

"No, it's fine. It's yours. I need to get a new one anyway."

"But I won't smoke when I'm teaching. So…" She looks inside the bowl. "Oh, great. You already packed it. Do you want to smoke this on the side of the house?"

The ground on which the house rests descends as you move along towards the back of the house, which in effect raises the rear rooms a full floor up. On one side, there is a sidewalk that runs next to the house, and a fence that divides up our property from the neighbors encases it, leaving a tiny path. Or, Jackie's property.

The point is, when I used to live there, I would smoke pot on this path.

"Didn't there used to be a light out here?"

"No. What -- are you are already forgetting this place?"

"No. I just thought I remembered a light."

We smoke the bowl

Afterwards, we walk over to the porch and smoke cigarettes. Standing next to her -- high -- I am overcome by two paradoxical urges: to hug Jackie and to not hug Jackie. Essentially these two feelings represent two distinct lines of thought: one focuses on the temporary, the ephemeral, the now; the other on the long-term, the permanent, the later. Looking at this girl I am so comfortable around, with whom I can be completely relaxed, and whose cuteness fills me with the same excitement a kitten does, except that I also love her and want to have sex with her -- looking at her is wanting to hug her. But then as soon as that feeling swells, the repercussions of that action appear in my mind: the hug will perpetuate Jackie's love for me and her desire to get back together and she'll call me again this week and we'll hang out again and we'll have sex again and she'll ask why we're not together because clearly we still have feelings for each other and I won't really be able to answer without describing how uncontrollably, indiscriminately horny I've been for the last few months and how I've slept with a few women since the break-up and how much I want to continue doing it even though it doesn't really satisfy me in any meaningful way and I'll see her one day later and this time when we have the same conversation again I'll concede a little bit and then she'll get excited and seeing her make that face, that truly happy face will make me want to expand the concession to saying that I think we should get back together and we will and I'll be happy about it even and time will pass and the sexual desire will return and though Jackie will fulfill the brunt of it, she -- or any other girl, for that matter -- will never completely assuage it and I'll get frustrated and sad and feel terrible for putting her -- us both, really -- back into the same fucking situation again and we'll begin speaking less and Jackie will suspect the truth and she'll

feel somehow inadequate and I'll feel like I'm aiding in her lowering self-esteem even though I think she's beautiful and I'll understand that she can't help but think that way with me -- twice! -- wanting to end the relationship because of sexual needs and we'll both be unhappy and eventually I'll leave and we'll be right back where we started and I have to tell myself not to hug her

"So, listen, Jon--I don't think we should talk for awhile."

"Oh, yeah?"

"Yeah. Like until it's warm outside."

"Like my birthday?"

"No, like warm all the time."

"Okay."

We look at each other and can't help but smile. I let out a little laugh. A nervous laugh. Jackie laughs a little, too, but says, "I'm serious."

"No, I know."

"Especially after last night. I can't do that again."

We both giggle again. This is a weird conversation to have stoned.

We go inside and she finishes getting ready. I look around the apartment, my old apartment, and realize how empty it is. My stuff isn't here and Jackie has yet to fill up the vacant space.

She comes back out and says, "Ready?"

We walk down to the T together. Now, making this walk with her by my side reveals different feelings than traversing it alone. I think about all the times we were heading to the train to go to a movie or a play, the times we went to pick up food, to get coffee, to just walk around because we loved the city and we loved each other, and about how little we thought about the surroundings, how we only thought of each other and what the other was saying, and about how when I pass these same streets alone I'm forced to think about them, instead of enjoying them, or taking them in, feeling them.

We keep looking at each other as we stroll, and I know it's because we're aware that this will be the last time we see each other for a long time, and we're reluctant for it to end.

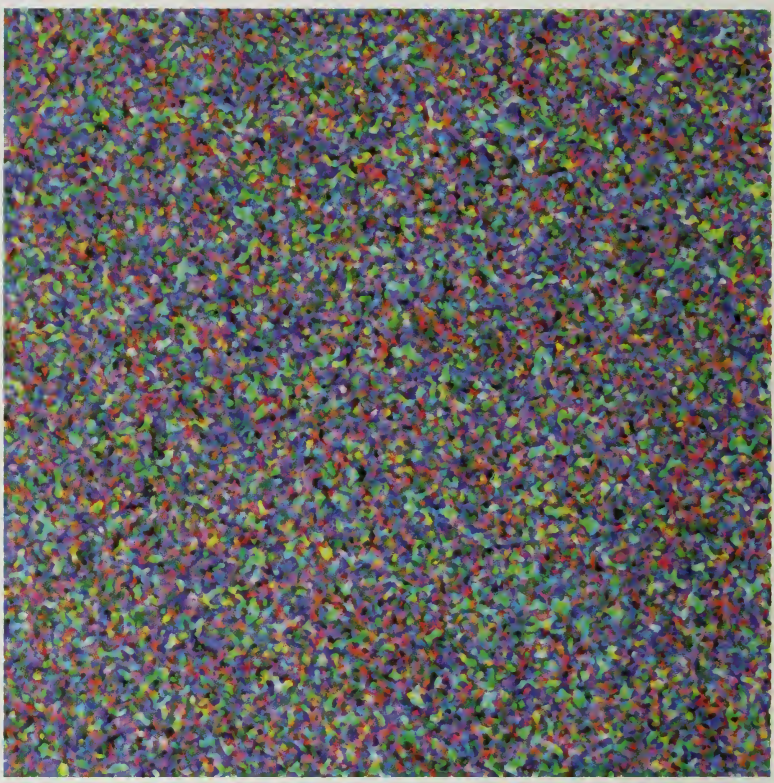
As soon as we get down to the platform, we hear both our trains coming -- she's going Inbound and I'm heading Outbound home. We have just enough time for her to look at me and say, "I love you so much, Jon," and for her to begin tearing up and for me to reply, "I love you so much, too, Jackie. So much," before the trains, which don't care about moments, which won't give you those few extra minutes to really look at the person you're standing next to and tell them that you're sorry, to tell them that you never meant for it to become like this, to look her in the eyes and really say all the things you should have said over the years -- before the trains come and we hug tightly and quickly and get on our respective trains going opposite directions.

Tequila

Reggie Themistocle

Caveman

Tom Coons



Drifting Mind

Ryan Czekanski

Every Pot Has a Lid

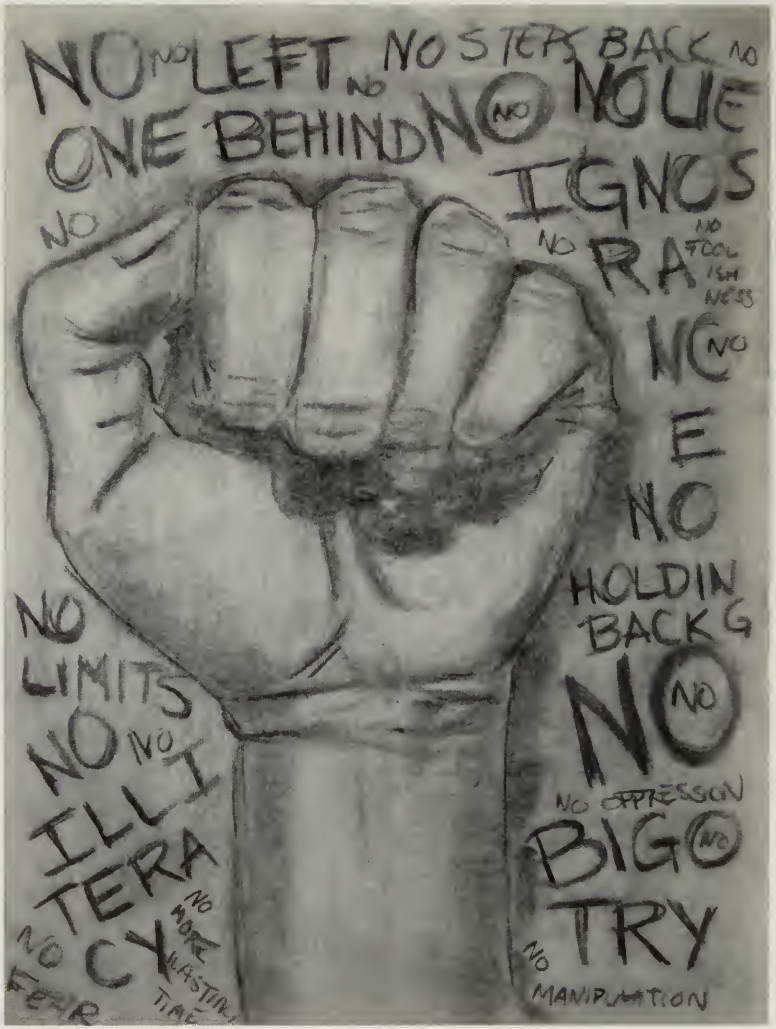
Tom Coons

Princess

Tom Coons

Untitled I

Noam Shabani

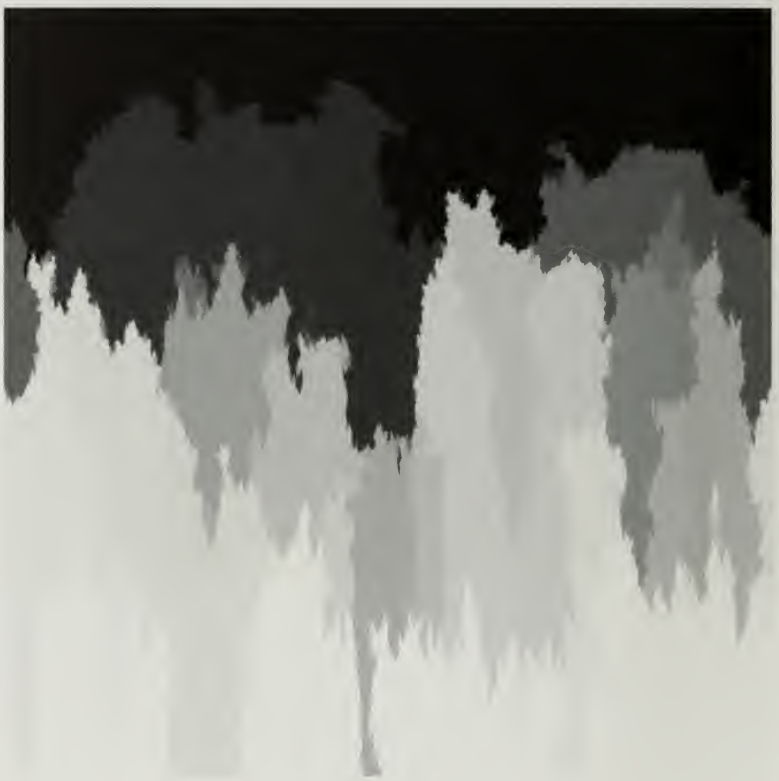


NO

Reggie Themistocle

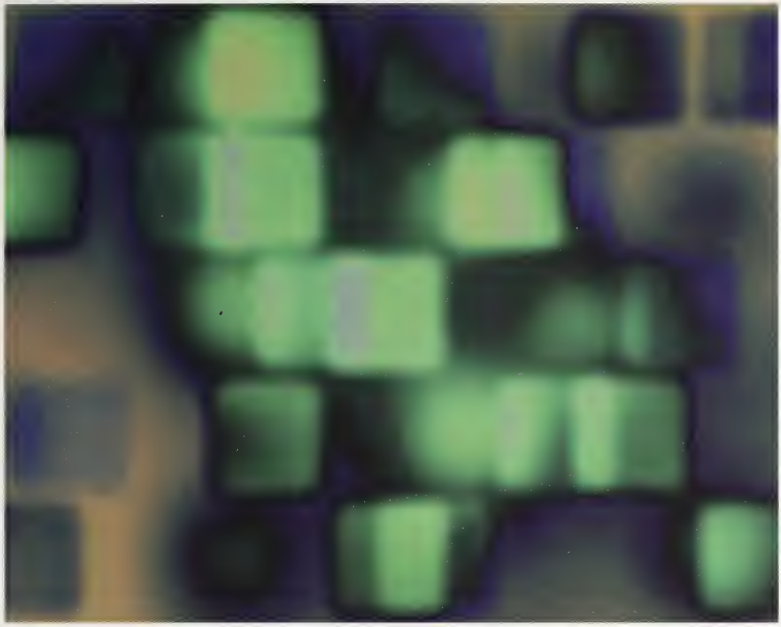
Untitled II

Noam Shabani



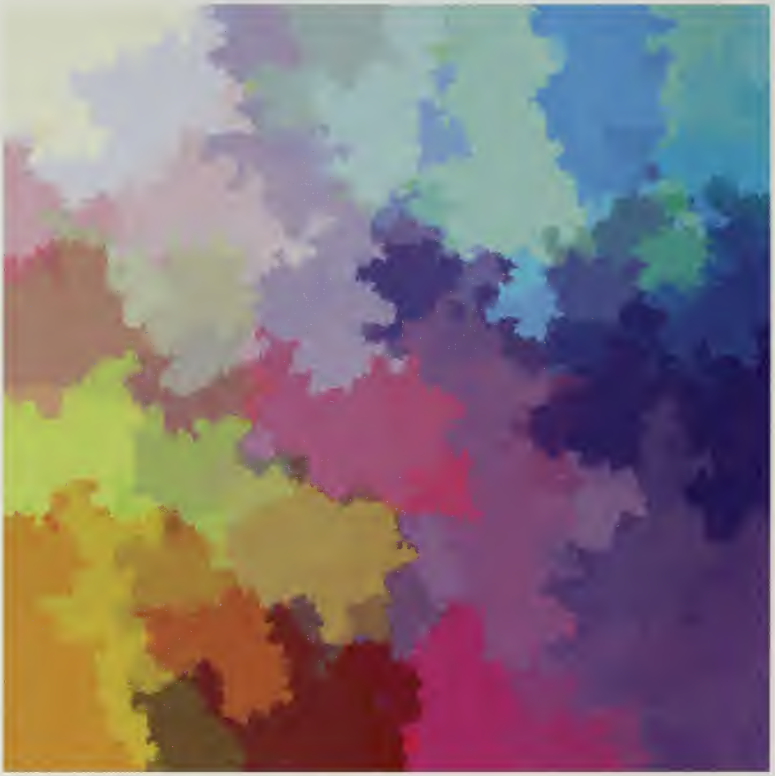
Strange

Ryan Czekanski



Tiles Nue

Ryan Czekanski



Yellow

Ryan Czekanski

At Bay

Nick Carter

The fireworks sent the night sky into a temporary retreat as Michael pulled Abby down the dock. It was still early in the warm fall night. The couple sweat under their thin jackets.

"Hold up, you goon!" Abby shouted. Michael had grabbed her by the hand and was literally hauling her behind him. Their feet stomped across the planks.

"C'mon, we want to stake out a good spot!" Michael exclaimed. "In a few hours this place will be swarmed with drunk tourists." Abby's curly hair was whipped into a tangle by the time they had reached the end of the pier. Michael let go of her and leaned on the railing.

"It's colder out here," Abby said, as she breathed the salt air deeply. Michael put his arm around her. "Yeah, it gets cooler out over the ocean. Particularly this spot and around this time."

They'd been together for three years. Abby was from Iowa and Michael, a Rhode Island native, always felt the need to explain the ocean to her. The first day they met in college, he'd made fun of her ignorance. "You see…" he mock explained, "…the ocean is this big, really huge amount of water that you shouldn't drink. There's tons of fish in it, and salt, so it's almost like soup. But you shouldn't eat it either." She punched him, but hit harder than she'd meant to. He ended up with a little purple bruise just below his shoulder. The air smelled of her perfume, lavender.

Abby got tired of that scent, and rarely wore it despite having half the bottle left. The sight of her, Michael thought, of her auburn hair and green eyes, seemed incomplete without the accompanying fragrance. She looked up into his eyes now and pecked him on the mouth. The waves rushed against the dock far beneath them and then whimpered back out to sea.

"So your dad's seen this before?" she asked

"Yeah, first time in 1953. Eleven years after it started."

"His dad died in the war right?"

"No, after. He got hit by a bus three days after he got back from Germany." Michael recited.

"What's he think about it?"

"Dad? He says that when he was a kid he believed the lights really were people's souls. Now he says he doesn't know. In any case, he doesn't come here anymore, cause' of how commercial it is now. Lewisport was just some boondock before they started showing up every year. Now there's tourism year round. The worst is, the night the souls come back, though I've heard the first day of spring can be pretty busy too. Some kind of blues festival."

Abby nodded. Michael tended to tell the same stories over and over. "And

whad'ya think? Do you think those are really the dead coming back to visit every year?"

She laced her fingers through his and squeezed. He shrugged. "I don't know. I've seen it three years and there's not really much you can tell just by seeing it. It's beautiful though."

"Remind me what they look like again?"

"Um, well… they're sort of like ovals, only they taper at the end. Actually, more like a leaf of spinach." He smiled at this description. It felt right. "They're this light blue color, and they're sort of see-through."

A pair of middle-aged tourists walked to the end of the dock and set up folding chairs. The man was dumpy and bald. The woman had a pile of ginger hair that spread from the top of her head like volcano frozen in mid-eruption. It could only have been dyed. The two set up their folding chairs, bantered about the contents of their cooler and bickered over who would get the last cider. A storm of fireworks went off over the town, which was still visible down the beach, several hundred feet away.

"We've got a few hours to go still. We don't have to wait here if you don't want." Michael said this in a tone that suggested leaving would be bad.

"No, it's fine," was her reply, but in a way that meant "I guess, if we have to."

Tourists began to trickle to the beach as the next hour passed. A group of twenty-something's set a fire not far from the water. Abby and Michael watched with mild interest but feigned indifference as the group below drank and set off bottle rockets on the sand. Abby checked her watch several times. At about nine-o'clock a pair of the beachgoers, a man and a woman, broke away from the rest, stripped down to their underwear and jumped into the dark, rushing water. They splashed each other and laughed, and shrieked at the chill of the water. Both returned shivering, skin pale. They took off their sea-soaked undergarments, toweled themselves off and dressed in the rest of their clothes. Each took a dry towel around their shoulders. They sat by the fire. Friends handed them cans of cold beer.

Michael tried to look disinterested as the woman stripped out of her remaining clothes. He wondered if Abby had noticed. The binoculars he'd brought for that night hung at his side. Abby wondered if Michael saw the man look up and smile at her.

There was a time when he might have been part of a group like that, Michael remembered. That year was spent in anticipation of college and the responsibility that would follow. Good times, sour events funny in retrospect, the occasional fling. He met Dawn the spring after graduation, at the end of those crazy days. They'd had a stormy relationship she broke off in August.

There was one last night at a campground on the beach. It was sweltering. The air was thick stew and the tent reeked of body odor. They slept naked on top of the one sleeping bag he'd brought. In the morning he drove her

home while she explained why she didn't want a long-term and long distance relationship. Dawn said that she'd call Michael and tell him when her flight to Colorado was leaving, so he could say goodbye. He never spoke to her after she got out of the car that morning. She'd be a senior at Colorado State by now. They hadn't mattered much at all.

The dock was now nearly full of tourists, some smelling of booze. On the beach a married couple set a towel on the sand not far from the drunken group with the bonfire. A pair of small blond children, a boy and girl, clung to their mother. Overheard distantly was a little voice asking, "Mommy, when is the ghosts coming?"

"So what was the story with the souls again?" asked Abby. Michael broke from his reverie.

"Hm? Oh. Well, you know there was a warship that sailed from Lewisport early in 1943." Abby nodded. Michael continued, "It was full of people from the area. Well, not all from the area but there was a disproportionately high number of sailors from Maine and Massachusetts and a few from Connecticut and Vermont. I think they left in April."

"What was the ship's name?"

"The ship?" Michael rubbed his chin "I think it was something like 'Endeavor,' or something with an E. Dunno. My dad would probably remember. Anyway, it sank October 7th, 1943 and the same night at midnight there were these lights that appeared on the water…"

"Where?" Abby interrupted.

Michael furrowed his brow, "Um…over the water…"

"No, I mean where did the ship sink?" Abby replied.

"I think it was somewhere in the South Pacific. I don't remember if it was shot down or if there was an accident or something. But anyway, that night these lights appear on the water…"

"The souls?" Abby interrupted again.

"Yeah. Supposedly there were as many as the people who died on the ship, but I kind of doubt anyone counted them the first night it happened. Probably a myth. In any case there are more every year so it's probably not related."

"You didn't tell me that before."

"I'm sure I did."

Abby squeezed Michael's hand and let it go. "Anyway, why do they think there are more all the time?"

"Dunno," said Michael. "Some of the people in the area say that when someone's drowned at seat the soul joins these ones. Pretty stupid idea since nobody can say why that should…"

A bright blast interrupted. The revelers had set off more fireworks. One had exploded not far from the ground. Michael flailed the cinders away. Abby fell backwards, twisting her leg as she averted her eyes.

"Sorry!" yelled a slightly slurred female voice onto the dock. It was one of

the brave, inebriated bathers. She waved up and smiled. "We're down to the last few. I don't think any more'll go off like that!" She ran back to her friends, full of chemical exuberance.

"Jerks. Real smart mixing booze and bombs," muttered Abby. She rubbed her knee through her jeans.

"You alright?" Michael asked. His eyes were still dazzled but he reached out a hand and hoisted her up.

"Yeah, just a bit shaken. You sure you don't want to move? I don't want to be in range of those idiots."

"Maybe. The best view of the bay is from here though, and there's only an hour and a half to go."

Abby shrugged. They walked down onto the beach. Within a half hour the dock was crowded with people elbowing each other for a spot closer to the water. The beach filled with families and couples, sightseers and a few townies as the night air chilled. Abby and Michael passed a couple completely covered by a blanket. They were hushed, but movements and murmurs suggested that they were in love, or something like it. A faint blue light was visible over the ocean, as if another moon were rising.

"That'd be the souls," remarked Michael. "You can see the light they give off from way out." Abby was already staring. "It's beautiful. Let's find a spot to sit down." They settled on a small divot of damp surf that earlier beachgoers rejected. The larger waves reached all the way to the couple's toes. The revelers set off the last of their bottle rockets and the group was now sitting around their fire in quiet expectation, the female bather lay asleep on a faded blue towel with an image of Bugs Bunny.

The hour to midnight drained away as they sat on the damp sand, and the souls of the departed rocked closer on every wave. Michael tried to engage Abby in conversation: about tomorrow's plans, fishing or hiking, to sleep in or get up early. But she was completely engrossed by the approaching lights. They became individual pinpricks of brightness on the horizon, resolved into blue halos nearer the shore.

"Oh my god, Michael they're beautiful!" She held tightly to him. A cold breeze blew in from the sea as the souls bobbed up and down on the waves. Each was more or less the same size and shape, a rough oval with ragged, trembling edges. It was possible to see through one if you came close enough.

The couple with the children got up in pursuit of their laughing daughter, who ran to the ocean's edge and began splashing a soul. The soul did not react. The father grabbed his daughter and dragged her, crying, back to the towel.

Michael had been dozing, but became fully awake as Abby stood and walked into an approaching wave. A few other people had also stepped into the chilly Atlantic water.

"Abby, what are you doing?" Michael asked.

She did not answer. Abby rolled up the legs of her jeans and stepped into the

sea. One pants leg fell down but she moved forward regardless, until the water was nearly up to her knees. She could just reach out and touch a soul with her fingertips.

A cold, buzzing sensation went through her arm, akin to the feeling of a sleeping limb as it begins to awake. The blue light of the soul brightened her faced and completely drowned out the green of her wide-open eyes. Her mouth was agape, her warm breath flying from it in wisps.

"Hi." A nearby beachgoer smiled. It was the male bather. Abby ignored him. She stepped further into the wave until she was waste deep. The man stood silent for a second, and shook his head. He rolled his eyes and walked further down the beach. Abby put both hands into the soul now and the sensation trembled, faintly, all the way under her ribs, into her chest and down her spine. From not far away a voice was heard yelling over the waves "Hey Fred, c'mere. It feels like your arm's asleep."

Michael watched from the beach as Abby bathed in the blue light. He'd never actually gone and touched one. He heard it felt weird. They were pretty to watch, and fun to show to people from out of town, but not something he was terribly impressed by. A few minutes ticked by. The souls began to wash back out to sea. Abby stood in the same position for a full minute and Michael started to think she might follow the specters out. But her arms dropped to her side and she returned to land, head bowed, staring at the surf, shuffling the sand in front of her.

"I'm ready to go," she murmured. He nodded. The stupid car seats were going to be soaked.

People were already leaving in a slow and steady trickle. The beach revelers were packing their things into a large van with a Delaware license plate. One nodded at Michael, another sheepishly murmured "Hey" and smiled. Michael could see the bathing beauty asleep against a window in the backseat. They left at the same time Abby and Michael did, following right behind them.

The car pulled onto the freeway. Abby had said nothing since they left the beach.

"Is everything alright?" Michael asked. As if searching for something she looked out the passenger window and back to him, and out the windshield.

"When did it become mundane to you?" Abby sighed.

They drove in silence back to the hotel room they'd rented for the weekend. The lights from the van behind them were visible until they reached their exit.

The Part-Time Island

Caleb Nelson

"I want to show you something good," Moriah said.

Jeremy didn't listen because he was throwing things—mostly the sand smoothed glass he had collected in a lobster trap bag—into the bay. It was summer and the blue above the office buildings across the channel held only two clouds and a Citco blimp. The clouds were streaks like jet streams, but wide. They dissipated across the sky like heat. Wispy. Jeremy found a crab leg. He threw it at a seagull, and it blew back onto the beach.

Waves chased it.

Moriah watched from a log behind the fire pit, where nothing burned anymore—charcoal, and reed charred bologna greaśe, the last of their sandwiches.

She glanced toward the sandbar. It was nearly low tide; she could tell because the motorboats had stopped whizzing over it, and through the channel. The island would soon be a peninsula again. A few fishing boats had congregated near it. Moriah looked down. The day pack by her feet looked empty. Her hands held the log, and she leaned forward crushing butterflies in her stomach.

"Listen to me Jeremy."

Jeremy knelt near by to pick up the whitest, most gnarled piece of driftwood. Moriah found it by the pig pens in the middle of the island, so someone must have liked it too, and carried it there. It was beautiful. It was useless. Jeremy threw it. It bobbed over the waves.

"The tide's going out," Jeremy said, and walked toward Moriah. "I can see the beginning of the sandbar. What do you think, an hour? Low tide's at ten, but my watch got sand in it. Stopped working."

"I hate watches," Moriah said.

"Me too." Jeremy sat beside her on the sand and laid his head against her leg. "But you'll miss your flight if we get stuck out here for another night." He breathed heavily. "Costa Rica. I wish you'd stick around, at least until the fall."

The seagulls multiplied. They soared and squawked toward the beach, and began swarming. Hermit crabs were sneaking back toward the water—a ruckus over hermit crabs. Moriah stood. She took a bottle of water out of the pack and laid the pack over their shoes. Everything was hidden by the log. She left. Jeremy followed.

The beach curved gently around the island, and Moriah walked along the embankment, which was concave. At the top whip grass rustled in the breeze and behind it trees. They were on the forest side of the island.

"Tell me a something," Moriah said grabbing at roots as she tried to climb the embankment, feet sliding in sand.

"This is an adventure," Jeremy told her from the top. He took the deer trail,

LAWRENCE
GILLETTE

which lead easily up the embankment a few feet beyond where Moriah was climbing. He offered her his arm. He lay on the whip grass, and it lashed his shins. It cut them. "You chose the highest part." He said; he laughed.

"I like adventures." She ignored his arm and took a running leap; grabbing the whip grass with both hands, her feet kicked uselessly at the sand, crumbling the embankment. She pulled herself up with her arms. Her hands burned, ripped by the toughness of the grass, and Jeremy grabbed under her armpits. They both pulled.

Green, yellow, brown, filtered sunlight, scraped knees—birds chirped. Moriah stepped over the whip grass as she walked. "I like the beach better," she said.

Jeremy looked into the grass, and could not see his feet. "We should get our shoes."

Moriah smiled and skipped out onto pine needles and a path. She scrunched her toes. "I prefer to feel the things I step on."

Wind picked up and rustled the grass around Jeremy's feet. It seemed to slither around his ankles, making way for slimy creatures beneath. He leapt after Moriah, and when he reached the path he shook one leg. He rubbed his hands in his T-Shirt.

"You look white," Moriah told him.

"Doesn't it bother you that we're stuck? What if one of us was to get bit by a snake or something? That pig farmer wouldn't help us. I know he wouldn't. Remember how he glared at us when he passed us on the beach last night?"

Moriah looked up, all pines. She breathed through her nose. No she told him; no they were not stuck. They were exploring. Explorers don't need to have a way back, just a healthy contempt for time in the conventional sense. Besides, she explained, at least they were not in one of the office buildings across the bay, or in a hospital—it's much harder to not be stuck in one of those places. At least they were not waiting for something good. At least they were looking for it.

"Where are we going?" Jeremy was watching the ground intently and stepping high over the big rocks.

"We're going to the best place on the island," Moriah told him. "I haven't shown you everything yet. There's a lot to see." She led him through the pine forest, up a slight hill and out into a meadow.

"Why do you have to go to Costa Rica?" Jeremy asked.

"It's only for a semester. I'll be back before graduation." Moriah climbed over the largest rock on the island to where the pig pens were. She jumped off of it into a pile of grass clippings. The house across the lawn was a small one, white. "I wonder who lives there. I've never seen this mown."

"What about after college?" Jeremy looked down at her from the top of the rock.

"I'll probably go back to Costa Rica."

"But you don't even know if you'll like it there yet. What if it's too wet and buggy for you?"

"Then I'll go to Peru. I don't know. I just want to be somewhere that I can practice my Spanish. Jump down!"

"I'll crush you."

"Jump Jeremy! I'll move if you're going to hit me."

Jeremy climbed down the rock and sat in the pile of grass next to Moriah. He lay back and breathed. "That's fresh," he said. "I like it here. It's like hard work and lemonade…Can I have the water?"

The pigs gathered on the marshy side of their pen to nap, and when Moriah and Jeremy passed them a few grunted. "You're going to like this Jeremy. I know you're going to like this."

"Is it a hot tub and two beers?" The ground was wet and Jeremy's toes sunk in. He wiggled them. He smiled. "Thanks for spending your last day with me," he said.

Moriah grabbed his hand and lead him between the reeds. "We're almost there," she said.

"What time's your flight?"

"I don't know. We have tons of time."

"Not tons. Slow down. I'm slipping. I don't want to fall into the reeds."

The path they were walking on was a packed down hummock that the pig farmer had made years before to get through the marsh to the other side of the island. The muck on either side was thick, and walking on the path was like walking on a wet log. But it was soft. The mud spattered and dried on Jeremy's legs, and it made his cuts from the whip grass itch.

"I need to tell you something," Moriah said. "I need to tell you something, but you can't be mad."

Jeremy rubbed at the mud on his legs.

"I knew that the sandbar wouldn't be up long enough. I knew we were going to get stuck. I thought it would be good to spend time together. It was fun wasn't it? I love sleeping outside. It was so much fun."

"It was good. We could have brought sleeping bags at least though. Every part of me is sandy."

"That was the fun of it. Don't be mad. You wouldn't have come if I told you." Moriah disappeared beyond some cat tails. "We're almost there," she yelled.

A rope bridge stretched across a deep mucky stream. It was made of two crossed logs rooted deep in the mud on either side. Three ropes went across, two for holding and one down the middle for walking on.

Jeremy went first. He went first because he said he didn't trust the thing. Stiff, white knuckles, watching the water beneath him; he paused near the end.

Moriah jumped on. "Wait!" he told her.

"Oh, wait yourself, don't worry so much. What's the worst that will happen? You'll fall, get muddy. It'd be refreshing. Look at my armpits. I'd like a swim right now anyway."

"Wait! Careful, there are snakes in there."

"There are no snakes—" she slipped and one of her legs fell into the mud, the other bent. She straddled the rope, holding it in the crux between her shin and foot. She tried to pull herself up with her arms. "Ah damn. I'm getting rope burn. I'm letting go. Don't let me drown." She laughed. She let go. She fell.

Jeremy looked petrified, stone still and white. Perhaps time did stop, because it took so long for Jeremy to recover.

Moriah fell. She landed shoulder first on a black snake, and it didn't like being crushed. It bit her, and held on. Moriah stood and flapped her arm. The snake flailed like a streamer. "Damn snake," she said and grabbed it by the neck. It choked. It let go. She threw it in the water. "Give me your hand. Help me up," she said.

"Was that poisonous?"

"I don't think so. Help me up. I don't want to stand in this snaky water. Grab my hand. No. My hand. Help me up. I need to get somewhere so I can look at this."

Jeremy grabbed her arm. He slipped, and fell on top of her. Stiff whiteness floundering, then covered in mud they pulled themselves out using the rope bridge. They sat on the bank, and Moriah looked at her snakebite.

"It's rounded; it was just a water snake," she sighed.

"A water snake." Jeremy repeated this to himself. "We need to get out of here."

The reeds whispered things in the breeze, and Jeremy followed Moriah like she understood them. Doggedly he watched her ankles. Moriah skipped up a final hill.

"This is it," Moriah said. "See. It's beautiful." Blood trickled from the snake-bite, but she had stopped holding it. It would scab. "This is the best place on the island."

"It is?" Jeremy walked to the edge of the embankment, and sat. Moriah followed.

"This is the empty side," Moriah said.

"Look at all those boats," Jeremy exclaimed. "Wouldn't it be a blast to own a fishing boat? I'd get one big enough to live on, and go out on weekends and just fish. You feel so free out here."

"What would you do during the week?"

Jeremy laughed. "I need to have a job Moriah. I've got student loans to pay off now. I can't keep dicking around."

"I guess so." Moriah sat beside him. "See the ocean, and the clouds, and those seagulls dropping clams on those rocks? I wonder what it's like to be a

seagull—flying, making games of food. Always by the ocean. No migration. They're exactly where they want to be."

Silence followed, and the wind, and the waves, and Jeremy asked, "What's so great about Costa Rica?"

"Same that's great about anywhere." Moriah said. "I just don't want to get stuck somewhere."

"I know what you mean." Jeremy looked down the embankment at the sand. He jumped off and ran onto the beach. He picked up a piece of sand smoothed glass. It was beautiful. It was useless. He held up. "This is the best one," he said.

An Occurrence on the Susitna River

Cory Fletcher

It was two or three days went by before we'd a catched any fishes whatever. They'd said the river was over run with considerable Alaskin Sammin, but Jim and me reckoned them stories couldn't be true, not by a sight. Come down from Mount Watana, we was on a particular mission of sorts.

Jim and me we'd been up on that there mountain for a considerable spell, settin' traps by the river and constructin' a fine log cabin that we was both monstrous proud about, when a messenger come up and give us the word. He had a message that come straight from the horses mouth so he'd said, and apparently that horse wanted to tell us just how sick Tom Sawyer had got to be. That messenger he said that Tom had caught a lookemia, and that the only way to cure a lookemia was with a stem cell. Now me and Jim had never heard nothin' about a stem cell, or where to find it, so we set straight to askin' around to the locals if they'd heard anything about it. Most nobody had heard a thing about the stem cell, and we reckoned the whole message might clear have been one of Tom's practical jokes, till we found a right usual looking fellow named Joe who'd said he read about that particular kind of cell in the newspaper just today.

This man Joe said he read an article that talked about a stem cell, and the best he remembered, the paper had said that not a single stem cell had slipped past a woman by the name of Sarah Palin. According to Joe, this woman Sarah lived down the Susitna River on the way to Anchorage. Our cabin up at Mount Watana was right up against the Susitna, and it looked over a wide spread of river that sparkled ever so fine in the late afternoon. Our traps fetched trout there on the bank every morning. The water looked so awful still and grand then that it could bring a tear to your eye and even make a body feel reverence for the world.

So since this Sarah Palin lived just a few days down river, Jim and me reckoned that we could resk takin' a trip down and see her. We knowed that there warn't much snags or dangerous water betwixt us and Anchorage by word of fishing expeditions that past by, so we lashed up a raft from timbers we'd cut for the cabin and set out down the river looking for as many stem cells as we could get. Seeing as Sarah Palin was so good about not letting any stem cells get by her, I reasoned that she must be sitting on a considerable pile by now, and would have some spares laying around.

As I was saying, it was the third day on the river before we catched any sammins. The river was fixin' to slow down some when we found a narrow

chute filled with the fish jumpin' and hoppin' as they clumb their way upstream through the shallows. It was like shootin' fish in a barrel. I started us a little fire at one end of the raft while Jim he catched about a dozen of them sammins, throwin' all but the best four back, and with that we had ourselves a dinner of it. It warn't long before that sun crept to its nest behind the white topped mountains, and soon the water was all sparkles on account of the moon and the stars and the clear night sky. Filled to the brim with fish and downright satisfied, I set down to sleep thinking of sammins, poor sick Tom, Sarah Palin and the hope of finding us some real stem cells.

Sometime in the early morning before the sun'd come up, I was startled awake by a frightful noise come from the sky. The air sounded like such a roaring hurricane, and I saw that Jim was afright. He hadn't noticed that the uproar had waked me he was so busy looking every which way for the source of the noise. So I set to pretending I were still asleep and watched Jim in his panic through my narrow eye lids. Just when the noise got to be intolerable loud, a black ship came whizzing over head, making chase for a family of moose in run along the riverbank.

"Laws, ah ain' ne'r see sich witch craf'!", yelped Jim as he scrambled for cover next to me in the wigwam. "Chile, git yo'sef 'wake! Didn' you heah dat pow'ful screamin' en de sky? It's a draggin! Skasely a 'splanation cud 'scuse it, 'twarn't it a genuin' draggin!"

Pretending not to hear Jim or the ruckus I layed full still next to him, doin' my best to play dead. As the moose disappeared into the distance with black ship in tow, the air quieted down considerable and the raft came by a fishing boat agoing up river. As the boat got close Jim called cross the water at it, askin' if the dragon was known to hunt peoples, or if it lived mainly off moose. The men on the boat hollered something back at Jim I didn't quite catch, but he seemed satisfied for it and set back down next to me, shakin' his head and grumblin' to his self about draggins under his breath.

When I came to, Jim was leaning over me and the sun was up over the treetops and everything appear'd much recovered from the early mornin' ambuscade on the moose. Jim was frightful excited and I had to make like I had no idea what was the cause. Lying to Jim might just fetch me some bad luck, but I was willing to take the chance if it meant a good story for Tom later on when we showed up with all the stem cells we was fixin' to find.

"Huck! Why, you's sholy gitt'n up f'r de firs' time dis mawnin'? Ah kin't skasely b'leeve dat! Didn' ye heah da draggin 'sturb de peace dis mawnin'?"

"A dragon? Why Jim, I hain't heard not one sound 'till this here moment! You mean to tell me there was a dragon flyin' about and I slept right on through unawares? I don't take no stock in dragons. I think you was havin' one of your nightmares. I thought you'd a grown out of such nonsense."

"Naw! I's ast a fishin' boat 'uz passin' by wen we's come 'roun de ben' back dere, en dey sez to Jim dat de draggin is call'd A-pa-che. Dey sez dat Sarah

Palin rides de draggin wen she hunt fur de moose!"

I reckoned that what them farmers told Jim was the truth. If Sarah Palin was so good at keepin' the stem cells from gettin' where they'd a otherwise got to, why wouldn't she use a flying black dragon to ride around on. She seems a right n'dustrus sort of gal, the kind who gets what they're after. In spite of my wanting to agree with Jim, there was no way I could quit the joke now that it'd begun. I felt low-down and ornery for doing it, but there warn't no help for it once I'd started. Jim went on with the story of Sarah Palin hunting those moose from a dragon called Apache, and before he could finish the tale we came 'round a bend in the river and before us stood a great plantation.

Along the river edge there was a great many farms, with little chimney'd houses betwixt the crops and livestocks, their windows all closed in spite of mild weather. Maybe they didn't open at all. Behind those was a mill for grain, and a butchers to dress livestock and fresh game. I thought it must take a real sivilised person to take pains to kill their own live animals right on the property. While I was busy thinking 'bout how I might learn some sivility from the master of such a butchery, Jim had his eyes fixed on the fountain up toward the great house. It was a monstrous grand fountain, surrounded by lit up crosses with one huge cross in the middle of the fountain. They looked just like Miss Watson's little cross necklace only they was much grander and so much greater in numbers. They looked as though they might have been made from ice but I reckon I couldn't quite say for sure.

Just then there was a deafening horn blast, and heading straight for us at full tilt was a powerful large boat! We'd both got so hung up on seeing sights that we'd clean forgot to watch the river. My souls but I was scared because I hadn't no confidence in our winning the fight, and Jim and me dove into the water right before the boat whaled our raft and smashed it to smithereens. When we come to the surface the ship was coming to dock at the plantation. On either side of the boat was the words "DRILL BABY," in large letters. The dragon Apache was perch'd on the top deck of the ship. I reckoned that meant Sarah Palin was on board. Me and Jim both swam for it and we made it to the shore of the plantation. I was dog-tired from all the excitement, and layed on the bank in attempts to collect myself. Jim he wasn't much tired and was at tryin' to wrung himself dry. As we set there on the bank thinkin' how the DRILL BABY had most whaled us as it split the raft in twain, the shadow of a woman fell over us where we'd set. At first it only looked like the shape of a woman as the figure stood blocking the sunlight from my face. Around the edges you could see the rays of light, sort of the way a solar eeklips is. As the womanlike eeklips approached it became more human until finally we saw what we was lookin' for from the start.

"Mister O'Bama, is that you? Gee, I sure wasn't expecting to be seeing you here today up in Alaska! To what great honnar do I ough this great privilege! Welcome! Welcome to tha Palin Ranch, ya know!"

As luck had it we'd washed up right on Sarah Palin's shore. We'd a seen the sign on the dock, "THE PALIN RANCH," if we warn't distracted so. I didn't know any O'bama but I reckoned I couldn't pass up a chance to be received royally. I whispered to Jim that he ought to play along on account of the dragon, in case Sarah Palin and her dragon warn't kindly to strangers.

"I's 'fraid dat es true. I's Mista O-bomber. You's pow'ful kine t' len' us a han'. We's wrack'd de raf' en swum t' dis propaty fur deah life. Dis heah boy, mah boy, es de page. Anytin' yo'sef d'sire ma lady, jes' ask mah son 'ere and sholy he'n sot it rite! Pooty good t' meet yo'sef, Sarah Palin!"

"Oh, Mister O'Bama, I just wanted to tell you how proud I am to have ya here at tha ranch. It's truly a grate honnar to have a man with us who we all respect. You came from the country of Africa, just like so many other brave cherished Africans. My own party might call me a rogue for talkin' to ya here today, but that's the sort of maverick I am. I reach across the isle and blur those stubborn party lines!"

Sarah Palin paused, and winked; it warn't at me nor at Jim nor at nobody else. It catched me as strange she'd wink'd at nobody in particular, but I played that I hadn't noticed. I was the page now. A good page knowed all about politiks and ethiks and warn't thrown off by winks. By this time a servant had come up and gived us dry clothes to wear so we'd done stripped bare, and forgot there was ladys present. After a considerable long stay on Jim, Sarah's eyes moved to me, and back to Jim again. I hoped there warn't going to be no suspicion of us and our claims to be who we was. But she started right up again like she was none the wiser, so I reckoned that maybe she warn't. Dressed in dry clothes we followed Sarah Palin as she kept on about her sociability.

"I've just been entertaining so many good honest folks, without the bias of the main stream media. Speaking straight to the American people, tellin' them like it is! One of the ways I've been pushing the envelope is I've spent just oodels of money on pricey clothes and julery - from more foreign countries than any other politician in U.S. history, too! Once I'm done with all these beautiful things, I'm donating them to a charitable purpose. If we can get more Americans to buy accessories from all over the world and then donate those things to charity, we can really get that trickledown flowing again! This is just one way that I'm conducting foreign relations like a maverick in the international community."

Sarah Palin steered us up toward the fountain, going on in her way whilst me and Jim gazed around at the farms and workers who tended them. They'd stop only when they talked to an overseer or to Sarah Palin herself. Any time they finished one task they set down right away and start a new one. I had reckoned they was slaves until Sarah Palin told us they was her hired servants. She called them her Middleclassers, and even though she said they was free and proud men and women, they all walked around heads down as though they'd got invisible hundred pound weights tied on their face.

As we reached the fountain, which anyone but Miss Watson would have reckoned a monstrous fine use of the sacred crucifix, Sarah Palin stopped talking and pulled her hair back tightly and did up two extra buttons on her suit coat. She snatched a Bible from one of her Middleclassers, sending him sprawling backward into the dust, and shot him a glare what dared defiance and commanded respect. Though she were the source of their troubles they dasn't speak about her injustice. My heart goes out to those poor Middleclassers. If they'd just stop obeying her cruel commands her power'd a been most ruined. I was starting to wonder if this Sarah Palin were such a sivilised lady after all. A nurse placed Sarah Palin's infant into her hand that warn't holding the Bible. At the last moment she grabbed a necklace that had a elegant chain and a large crucifix, and then put it on.

"The Lord Jesus is my Lord and Savior!" pled Sarah Palin, with a reverence.

Several of the Middleclassers gathered around the fountain was holding flashing boxes, all making copies of what they saw on the surface. Sarah Palin checked over these images and pointed toward the one she liked best. The others scurried away with their boxes into the shadows feeling shamed, downright low and ornery. The one she liked best was a simple portrait of her with baby and Bible, her shirt buttoned all the way to the cross around her neck, and a smile that becomed less believable with every minute we spent there.

Sarah Palin undid those two shirt buttons then threw in an extra one just for good measure. She shoved that baby back on the nurse and a Middleclasser fetched the Bible and the servants run off toward the great house. Seems Sarah was fixin' for Jim's attention but he warn't paying her no mind.

"Sarah Palin, the honored O'Bama reckons you got a mighty fine property here. He sure would be humble and satisfied to tour that mighty-grand house you got. He says he ain't never seen such a house all his life!"

I was back thinking about the stem cells and where Sarah Palin might keep 'em hold up. By-and-by I knowed they must be in that house one place or an other, and it were considerable fortunate she was obliged to show us in.

"Oh my! Of course, of course! You just come on in and make yourself at home, why don't ya! Up here in Alaska we know how to treat folks, we do!"

So Jim and me followed Sarah Palin away from the crucifixes and the farms through the front gate and toward the front door. I was tip-tone by neat rows of flowers and bushes of all sorts and colors when we come to the door and Sarah Palin hollered and the doors opened from the inside.

We walked through the doors and up ahead there was a monstrous large fireplace a roaring and more Middleclassers was feedin' logs into the fire. I wondered how many Middleclassers it taked to attend one Sarah Palin but I reckoned it warn't no less than a hundred on account of how many I seen. She set us down on chairs by the fire and I took to notice that us and the Middleclassers warn't hardly alone. On the walls was at least a hundred considerable large moose head complete with antlers. Pap hain't never caught no moose let alone a hundred, and I felt like Sarah Palin was just suited to be a hunter after all. I still hadn't decided if she were a

sivilised lady or not.

Jim he looked mighty restless, and I reckon it were on account of he was spooked by all the moose. He whispered just such to me but I told him that no O'Bama would a got scared by such a thing and so he toughed up. Over the fire was a mighty picture of a snake with the words "DON'T TREAD ON ME," wrote on bottom. I was a looking at this when Sarah come up from behind and scared a body half to death.

"Could I interest either of you fine gentlemen in an apple, by golly?"

We gave a respectful decline on account of we was still satisfied from the sammins we'd ate earlier. I was powerful thirsty but she didn't offer us no water so I didn't make a fuss. Now that we'd set down to Sarah Palin's parlor it seemed the right time to mention stem cells. I was just about to resk blowin' our cover and go asking about it when a Middleclasser catched Jim by the arm and spun him around.

"Misses Sarah Palin, yer lordship, you hath been deceived! This here riffraff ain't no more than a couple a drifters come to play tricks and make you look the fool! I seen O'Bama on the T-V and this surely ain't him! And his boy here, well by God he ain't even black!"

Cold sweat poured down my back and the hairs on my body all stood up on end. We'd been discovered, and I reckoned we might just get good and ransomed for our trickery. Jim he started to look mighty uncomfortable and was just starting to open his mouth when Sarah Palin come up out of her seat. I sensed she was about to call for a tar and feather, but instead she came across and whaled the Middleclasser cross the head. She done hit him so hard he right fell out of his shoes and slammed down to the floor.

"Why you ungrateful swine! How dare you question my cherished guests!" She screamed and struck the man again, this time to the ribs. The man rolled around the floor begging for mercy and getting none. It appear'd we was off the hook somehow.

"This is why only damned fools rely on the opinion of ignorant Middleclassers! Guards, take this man away! It's twenty-five lashes for this ungrateful dog! If a person isn't hard working enough to pull themselves up by their bootstraps and get a respectable education and job, they can't be expected to know a thing about politics! The boy ain't black you say? Well Mister O'Bama is only *half* black after all. It's obvious that this boy is mainly made up of his whiter half! Don't you know anything about biraciality? Twenty-five lashes, and may God in his infinite grace forgive you for your aw-dasity!"

As the guards dragged the injured man off to his fate, Jim and me looked to each other and breathed sighs of relief. I couldn't have come up with no such excuse for my whiteness, and I was right thankful that she done it for me.

"Golly! Gee, I sure am sorry about that Mister O'Bama! The Middleclassers think they know what's what but it's all come through the biased librul media. Well this is one gotcha journalist that won't get you, count on me!"

Sarah Palin walked over to a cabinet and got out a bottle with some sort of

thick red liquid inside. I reckoned it must a been wine, but she didn't offer us none, and Jim and me didn't think to ask for any. She poured some of that liquid in a cup resting on the mantle, and then she brought it along and set down in a chair across from me and Jim. She took a considerable sip and it stained her lips red as a cherry. With her right satisfied and the evil purged as it were, I got the feeling this'd be the best time to ask about the stem cells from around these parts, and so I did.

As I spoke the words Sarah Palin took to looking mighty grave. She said they was the devil's magic, and that they came strictly from a boar's shins. Now, I'd seen many a boar in my day and I'd never took no notice of any particular thing about the shins. When I told her that I'd never seen a boar's shins before, she scooted her chair closer and got even more grave. I can't reckon why but just then I thought about Miss Watson.

Did you know that the darned librul media tried to make my daughter get a boar's shins just a few weeks ago? Why it made me steamin' mad, it did! I told those reporters that it's up to my daughter whether or not she's going to get a boar's shins! I told them it was her choice but that she were a Christian and so there wasn't no way she could choose to get that boar's shins because they're a sin, and that she would choose to have a baby instead! Babies come when a married man and woman consa mate their marriage, and since my daughter already went and consa mated she was just gonna get married afterward instead! Kids these days, always doing a thing backwards. I guess that's what they mean by generational change!"

I couldn't make it out no way. How we'd come to be talking on babies and consa mation I hadn't the foggiest. It was then I realized we was on a goose chase and warn't agoing to find any stem cells with Sarah Palin. We'd been fooled and had nobody to blame but us. I thought about Tom and felt so awful I most wished I was dead. We hadn't come no closer to finding any boar's shins, or the stem cells that was in them. I just couldn't believe they was a sin, and if they was and Tom needed 'em to beat his lookemia, I reckoned I'd just go to hell for it.

Jim and me we thanked Sarah Palin for such powerful fine company and made our way back down to the Susitna. We said we had folks a waiting on us down river and warn't disposed to cause them worry, and we must be off. Our raft had got busted up and was most likely caught up on a snag half ways to Anchorage by now, but Sarah Palin gived us a bran new canoe to finish up the trip with. It had the words "PRO LIFE," written down either side and warn't it all downright bully! As we clumb into the canoe and made to shove off, a Middleclasser with a flashing box came by and saw us off. When the dock was most out of sight I looked back and saw Sarah Palin waving good bye. I was barely able to make out her shout as we drifted towards Anchorage and the boar hunt I'd already begun to plan.

"See you in two-thousand and twelve!"

I reckon I have no idea what she meant by that.

Sartre and the Self-Created Self

Jen Burger

Jean-Paul Sartre defines the "humanism of existentialism" as "a doctrine which makes human life possible and, in addition, declares that every truth and every action implies a human setting and a human subjectivity." People equate existentialism with the dark side of human existence; both Christians and Communists charge existentialists for ignoring human solidarity. The Communists suppose "…that [existentialists] take pure subjectivity, the Cartesian *I think*, as [their] starting point; in other words, the moment in which man becomes fully aware of what it means to him to be an isolated being; as a result, [they] are unable to return to a state of solidarity with the men who are not [themselves], a state which [they] can never reach in the *cogito*."

But Sartre's purpose is to explain the better side of the existentialist positions: atheistic-existentialism, which does *not* ignore human solidarity. Sartre wants to pit atheistic existentialism against the idea that an individual is necessarily an isolated being. From the point of view of the atheistic existentialist, Sartre elaborates that "existence precedes essence." The opposite point of view holds that "essence precedes existence." Sartre writes the that existence that precedes essence is consequential to that of value, choice, action, responsibility, anguish, forlornness, and despair. The characteristics of these notions - despite the contempt that humans will endure - will lead to an authentic self.

It is worth mentioning that Sartre's philosophical position is often misunderstood. Christians claim that if an existentialist denies the moral duties of human life by rejecting God's commandments and the eternal truths, he excludes the ability of human beings to govern themselves and others, lost in a world with no one to guide them. As a result, they will become morally vacuous. The Communist, on the other hand, argues that the existentialist practices a bourgeois philosophy: that is, to be an existentialist is to contemplate, and according to the Communist, contemplation is a luxury.

Perhaps individualism is too egotistical -- it leads humans to think more of their selves while forcing them to forget about their fellow humans. That being said, the Communists accuses the existentialist of "inviting people to remain in a kind of desperate quietism because, since no solutions are possible, we should have to consider action in this world as quite impossible." The human will is annihilated because it is in a state of quietness and passivity, i.e. inaction. Consistent with their charge, the Communists may ask: What is the point of acting upon something when nothing in this world is fair or matters? According to the

Communist, the existentialist seemingly encourages this pessimistic point of view because they focus on the "dwelling on human degradation" and perhaps forget the beautiful aspects of life, e.g. the smile of a child.

Reflecting further upon these misunderstandings, Sartre clarifies that there are two forms of existentialism. The first form is that essence precedes existence. Those who fall under the aforementioned category are religious people who believe in a divine or perfect creator, e.g. the Christian God, or philosophers like Descartes or Leibniz who grant God's existence by merely using rationality. Rather than having subjectivity as a starting point in human existence, objectivity *is* the starting point. Sartre gives an example of an object: a paper cutter. For a paper cutter to be produced, an artesian has to have a conception of both. What is its specific use going to be, and what is the method needed to produce it? "Thus, the paper cutter is at once an object produced in a certain way and, on the other hand, one having a specific use." The ensemble of the paper cutter is "both the production routines and the properties which enable it to be produced and defined." This also is the essence. The essence or ensemble precedes the actual. And, Sartre claims, the presence of the paper cutter or any material object is determined -- production precedes existence. Like the artesian being the creator of the paper cutter, God creates humans.

Sartre says that no matter what doctrine is in question, whether Descartes' or Leibniz' or any religious doctrine, they "always grant that will more or less follows understanding or, at the very least, accompanies it, and that when God creates He knows exactly what he is creating." If God has a concept of man like the artisan having a concept of a paper cutter, it follows that certain techniques and conception of producing these "objects" must be realized one way or another. The argument is as follows: if we can notice that there are objects in the world that have been created, an artisan must have had an idea or conception to have made it come into existence; namely, there had to have been someone or something to have created it. A paper cutter could not pop into existence without a creator. Similarly, man could not have popped into existence without a creator. Therefore, an artisan created a paper cutter, and "the individual man is the realization of a certain concept in the divine intelligence." God created the individual.

Sartre is aware that there are other atheistic philosophers who present the notion that essence precedes existence. Diderot, Voltaire, and Kant claim "Man has a human nature; this human nature, which is the concept of the human, is found in all men, which means that each man is a particular example of a universal concept." If all men (or humans) are limited to having the same basic qualities, then "the essence of a man precedes the historical existence that we find in nature." However, Sartre will claim the aforementioned is meaningless because man defines himself.

The second form of existentialism is that the notion of the self and what *it is* constitutes the idea that existence precedes essence. Sartre defines the latter as

atheistic existentialism. In order to understand that existence precedes essence, atheistic existentialism "states that God does not exist, there is at least one being in whom existence precedes essence, a being who exists before he can be defined by any concept, and that being is man or Heidegger says, human reality." Basically, Sartre means that when one is aware of itself, only afterwards is he able to define himself, and "[if] a man… is indefinable, it is because he is nothing."

Sartre says that a man is autonomous is assigning existence to himself through the act of will (e.g. Descartes' *"Cogito ergo sum")*. "Not only is man what he conceives himself to be, but he is only what wills himself to be after this thrust towards existence." Essentially, man is a subjective being, and he is nothing unless he makes something of himself. This idea seemingly claims a sort of philosophical idealism -- he cannot know any other perception except his own. And since he can only know his own perception, this entails that he is aware of himself. How does he define himself? "Man is at the start a plan which is aware of itself, rather than a patch moss, piece of garbage…[and] nothing exist prior to this plan." When he makes a conscious decision, he *wills* himself to do something, and he has to take responsibility for his action. Accordingly, the current decision he made today is only a manifestation of the prior decisions he made in the past -- up to the point when he came into existence. He must take responsibility for his actions because, again, he cannot jump out of his own perception; therefore, he has to create himself like an author of a book.

Also, not only is man responsible for himself as individual, but for all other humans as well. In his perception, he witnesses other minds in the world that he is a part of. And since each individual chooses their own self, they also are choosing all men. Plainly, they have to respect each other because they all have choice, and every time they make a choice - by acting upon it - that choice has value. Choice carries value, and intuitively humans want to be and to do "good."

An atheistic existentialist has to choose a universal and particular point of view for humanity ¾ namely, that I choose humanity and myself. Not only should we perceive ourselves as one, we should also perceive ourselves as being part of each other. And since I have this ability to choose, this entails that all humans are in the same position to choose. "To choose to be this or that is to affirm at the same time the value of what we choose because we can never choose evil." Intuitively, humans want good and nothing can be good for them without being good for all. For example, if I choose to vote for John McCain because he believes in war, then I am proclaiming that humans should vote for McCain and believe in war rather than voting for Barrack Obama, who believes the opposite. In the same way, if I decided not to get married and have children, I'm proclaiming that marriage is not important. All in all, not only am I responsible for myself, I'm responsible for everyone else, because I'm creating a certain image of man --which is a result from my own choosing and in choos-

ing myself I choose man.

Sartre asserts that in order for us to understand the meaning of atheistic existentialism, we have to understand the consequences that come with it. That is to say, humans will endure anguish, forlornness and despair. The moment a person realizes his own subjectivity - "that the individual chooses and makes himself; and… that it is impossible for man to transcend human subjectivity" - he cannot escape it. This realization causes deep and utter anguish or anxiety, because he is bound to his responsibility. Not only does he involve himself, but he also involves others. He should consider himself a prime example for humans. Consequently, he needs to act in accordance with what is good for all. This burden causes man to feel anxious, because he carries the burden of responsibility to choose what is right. Inevitably, one's choice will reflect on all of humanity: "For every man, everything happens as if all mankind had its eyes fixed on him and were guiding itself by what he does." If one does not think of this, he is otherwise masking his anguish.

Some of man's actions can be caused by anguish, because he conceives many possibilities in search of a solution. That is, when he is in the midst of an ethical dilemma, he must choose. Once he makes a final decision, that decision is valuable no matter what the given situation is. He has to take responsibility, even if the chosen one he made was bad. Man has to take responsibility for whatever is chosen as when he acted upon something, and that his social self, his image to others, establishes his being. For this reason, choice is valuable: "when they choose one, they realize that it has value only because it is chosen." But who are humans to go to otherwise when they are amidst an ethical dilemma? This anguish causes man to man to feel forlornness.

The idea of value and good becomes paradoxical when Sartre discusses forlornness. Forlornness for the atheistic existentialist is the realization that not only is he alone in this world, but God does not exist and he has to face the consequences of it. He feels abandoned. "The existentialist…thinks it is very distressing that God does not exist, because all possibility of finding values in a heaven of ideas disappears along with Him; there can no longer be an *a priori* Good, since there is no infinite and perfect consciousness to think it." How are humans to value something good when an *a priori* existence does not exist? Man is left with no absolute moral truths. In turn, man is forlorn. "If existence really does precede essence, there is no explaining of things away by reference to a fixed and given human nature." Sartre asserts that if this is the case, then necessarily man is not determined, but free.

On the other hand, Sartre quotes Fyodor Dostoevsky: "If God did not exist, everything would be possible." This is the start of existentialism. It entails that man is left on his own to come up with his own choice, he will do so without the assistance of an absolute being or truth.

Kant claims that we should never treat each other as a mere means to end. But what if one has to make a choice between staying at home with his lonely

mother, or to go to war to avenge his brother that the enemy killed? In either situation, someone must lose out. That is, "[if he] stays with his mother, [he'll] treat her as an end and not as a means… but [he] is running the risk of treating the people around [him] who are fighting, as a means; and conversely, if [he joins] those who are fighting, [he'll] be treating them as an end, and by doing that, [he runs] the risk of treating [his] mother as a means." All in all, anguish and forlornness go hand in hand with one another. Forlornness is the realization that we chose our being. Thus, whatever choice men make or action they takes, they are responsible for their interpretation of it. They choose what is valuable by taking action, because otherwise value is vague if nothing is absolute or morally true.

In order to understand the positions man is left with, that is, that he is anguished and forlorn, he needs to deal with his despair. "[Despair] means that [existentialists] shall confine [themselves] to reckoning only with what will depend upon [their] will, or on the ensemble of probabilities which make [their] actions possible." In other words, man is left with no other option except to depend upon himself, his will, or the different possibilities man faces. Ironically, the realization that existence precedes essence leads to an authentic self, because man will despair.

Once man understands that he is filled with illusions that he was otherwise unaware of, he will not be far away from reality. For example, "for the existentialist there is really no love other than one who manifests itself in a person's being in love." For instance, man cannot claim that Rachmaninov was a musical genius because he born a musical genius. Rather he should consider the processes and procedures that led him become a musical genius. That is, he created himself as a musical genius. The illusion is when man thinks of Rachmaninov as being some immortal thing -- man lacks the consideration that Rachmaninov created himself. The sum of his musical genius is the sum of all of his parts: his works that have been produced for the public and for himself, and many more things that were part of his existence. Attaining the knowledge of our despair "prompts people to understand that reality alone is what counts, that dreams, expectations, hopes warrant no more than to define man as a disappointed dream, as a miscarried hopes, as vain expectations." Essentially, man leaves his impression to other men. But really there is nothing. People should be motivated to create themselves in the best possible ways.

Sartre's underlying philosophy is that there is no absolute truth except that "consciousness [becomes] aware of itself." When man realizes that the subjectivity of himself, that he thinks and he exists, he has to take on that responsibility. Indeed, the involvements between choice and action defines man and the consequential aspects that he will endure - anguish, forlornness, and despair - will lead man to become autonomous. Man now has the freedom to do what he wills and also the understanding of the true nature of reality: that his own awareness and perception of himself and the world together is conglomerated

between choice, action and responsibility. Man must take it upon himself to promote goodness for himself and for all others.

The self is created by man, himself.

Source(s)

Jean-Paul Sartre. *Essays in Existentialism.* New York: Kensington, 1993.

Heteronormativity and Paternalism in the Early Peace Corps

Heather Turner

Sharon Spencer's *Breaking the Bonds* is a 1963 work of fiction for young adults. The front cover depicts a man and a woman in intimate flirtation and announces that the book is a "novel about the Peace Corps." Behind the couple is a school and courtyard where African children play. The back cover of the novel holds two quotes.

"The Peace Corps is a pledge of our best efforts to those people in the huts and villages of half the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery…to help them to help themselves…"
- President John. F. Kennedy

"*BREAKING THE BONDS* is a sensitive portrayal of what it means to be a Volunteer…"
- Sargent Shriver, Director, Peace Corps.

Breaking the Bonds collapses these two sentiments into one another, encouraging a conflation of the paternalistic developmental goals of Peace Corps service with the gendered personal development promised to volunteers. In other words, while the Peace Corps was one wing of an American foreign policy purportedly set on doing for poor countries what they could not do for themselves, *Breaking the Bonds* and other Peace Corps promotional materials promised men heroism and men and women heteronormative romance. In fact, volunteers stories reveal that the message of Spencer's fiction - that one's own heteronormative goals will best be accomplished through paternalistic Peace Corps service - corresponds logically with real-life Peace Corps practice, where volunteers and foreign country nationals were evaluated according to heteronormative, sexist standards.

My argument rests on four premises. The first is that paternalism was a critical feature of Kennedy's foreign policy, of which the Peace Corps was simply one component. For this reason, Peace Corps policy reflects the attitude that volunteers know what is good for host-country nationals. The second premise relies on the first; i.e., emboldened by paternalistic attitudes, volunteers tended

to encourage in host country nationals the values held dear to the volunteers themselves. Third, Peace Corps promotions promised recruits success in heteronormative pursuits. Thus, and this is the fourth premise, the Peace Corps attracted recruits who conflated Peace Corps service with their own gendered development. I shall conclude that at least some volunteers encouraged the development of sexist hierarchy among host country nationals.

Let's begin with the first points, which maintain that Kennedy's foreign policy was paternalistic, that Peace Corps policy as carried out by Shriver was no different, and that, minimally, we can deduce that volunteers were encouraged to paternalistically relate to host country nationals.

Kennedy's exhibited paternalism in his convictions that citizens of poor countries wanted to be like America and that it was America's job to transform them. These beliefs can be found in a number of his speeches and statements regarding the Peace Corps and other proposed foreign-policy programs. In 1956, Kennedy gave a statement on Vietnam wherein the country was presented as the figurative godchild of America.

"Vietnam represents a test of American responsibility and determination in Asia.

If we are not the parents of little Vietnam, then surely we are the godparents. We presided at its birth, we gave assistance to its life, we have helped to shape its future... This is our offspring - we cannot abandon it, we cannot ignore its needs…if it falls victim to any of the perils that threaten its existence… then the United States, with…justification, will be held responsible It was not just that America was responsible for the fate of Vietnam. What was good for Vietnam - and all decolonizing countries - was what was good for America. In a 1961 speech to Congress, Kennedy stressed "the strength of [America's] economy because it is essential to the strength of [the] nation. And what is true in [America's] case is true in the case of other John. F. Kennedy, "America's Stake in Vietnam" (paper presented at the Conference on Vietnam Luncheon in the Hotel Willard, Washington, D.C., June 1, 1956).

The message permeating the speech is that it is America's task "to assist the peoples of the less-developed nations to reach their goals in freedom" - whether or not those people wanted that "help."

The aim of the Peace Corps was just as paternalistic as the rest of Kennedy's policy. Furthermore, according to first Peace Corps Director Sargent Shriver, by 1964 the Corps became "the sharpest thrust of the United States policy" in Latin America. In Shriver's view, "there [was] a continuous universal election going on in the world…[and] [w]hat [was] being decided [was] nothing less than the future of the human race." He endorsed General Marshall's sentiment that the globe enflamed by revolt "of the little people of the world." Concerning these revolutions, wherein the future of the human race was at stake, it was the job of Peace Corps volunteers to keep it on the right track. Historian Michael Latham notes Kennedy articulated Peace Corps paternalism before

Congress one year earlier, explaining that volunteers were received warmly by host countries because they [the volunteers] represent the best traditions of a free and democratic society - the kind of society the people of Africa, Asia and Latin America long for as the ultimate end of their own revolution. Considering the stunning confidence Kennedy and Shriver had in the volunteers, it must have been very easy for volunteers to assume that they knew what was best for the host country citizens they were meant to help. I have not shown at this point that volunteers' ideals might be heteronormative; i.e., desirous of selves conceptualized according to male supremacist and heterosexist models of personhood and love. I presently argue that *Breaking the Bonds* and other Peace Corps promotional materials were likely to recruit volunteers who held just these types of heteronormative values. Furthermore, insofar as such materials spoke mainly to potential volunteers' desires to fulfill heteronormative goals for personal development and less about the goals of service, they promoted the substitution of the desire to help others (however paternalistically) by the desire to build a heteronormatively gendered life for oneself.

Two simple ads targeting personnel are evidence of this exact phenomenon in Peace Corps recruiting policy. One depicts a man who "just said NO" to entering the private sector. This man turned down "fat offers" from "six big corporations" in order to find out how "much he can give as well as how much he can take." The book *Chapters in Western Civilization* is at his desk; the image suggests that he is preparing to write himself onto its pages. The Peace Corps offer is "fatter" than the ones he received from the corporation because it strokes his manhood, giving him the chance to become a "courage[ous]" man of "stamina." The advertisement mentions he might get sent to one of 48 countries in Asia, Africa, or Latin America, and it gives three examples of services he might provide to host country nationals, but the man's body takes up over 60% of the ad and the text discusses the kind of man he will become - someone who figures out "what has to be done and [does] it" - not the reality of Peace Corps service.

The second ad is even simpler. It is a sketch of a Victorian woman's head. The neck is thin and held stiff by a tight, high-necked dress. A gigantic hat with large, delicate flowers has been placed precariously atop the woman's piled-up hair. The text reads simply, "Should a gentleman offer a Peace Corps assignment to a lady?" This ad promises a colonial woman's existence to female recruits. It fails to mention what kind of work she might undertake as a volunteer. It suggests that she, like the Victorian woman sent abroad on imperialist escapades, might be obliged to do nothing at all. Her dress would restrict her movement; her task would be to answer the offers posed to her by gentlemen, nay lords.

If each of these ads exploited potential volunteers' interest in their own gendered personal development, *Breaking the Bonds* did that even more effectively. The plot of the novel is simple. Anne and Bob do not know one another,

but Anne wants a change and Bob wants a change. They apply to the Peace Corps and are accepted. The Peace Corps brings them together. Their mood in Nigeria is determined by their relationship with one another. They become engaged. They are wildly successful as teachers. Bob saves a local celebrity couple, hereby gaining hero status. The book obviously concerns the personal lives of Ann and Bob.

More relevant to the current topic is the way in which their experiences as volunteers relate directly, turn by turn, to their personal development along heteronormative lines. For example, at the beginning of the novel, Anne is dissatisfied with her girlhood love, Mike. She thinks her life might improve if she joins the Peace Corps. In one scene, she and Mike are on an ordinary double date at Mario's. "[T]he atmosphere of Mario's [once] spelled "ROMANCE."

But not tonight. Now all the fun of Mario's was gone. Though her mind was miles away, Anne did her best to take part in the conversation. During a lull she asked: "Anyone heard much about the Peace Corps?"

It would be their last date. Anne breaks up with Mike. Then, right after assuring her mother that she still wants marriage, Anne takes the Peace Corps exam. Readers discover her there in Bob's sights; at the moment they each take the first step toward joining the Corps, the cat-and-mouse game begins. The relationship is far from egalitarian. At one point, Bob tells Anne his plans and asks if Anne is OK with them. Anne replies, "You're the boss." "Bob's response [is] a proud, wholehearted grin. 'That's what I like to hear.'"

As much as Bob is thrilled to marry a female gendered according to male supremacist desires, he is still troubled by his status in the eyes of his father. Bob's father felt the Peace Corps was about postponing masculine adulthood. So whereas for Anne, the high point of the novel is the engagement, Bob's resolution comes after his rescue of the important local couple in the form of a cablegram from his father.

> U.S. PAPERS CARRIED STORY OF AUTO RESCUE. SINCEREST CONGRATULATIONS. HOPE YOU CAN FORGIVE ME FOR NOT RECOGNIZING THE BEST SON A MAN COULD EVER HOPE TO HAVE…

As rescuer of indigenous peoples, Bob has now become the right kind of son, just in time to become the right kind of husband. Clearly, *Breaking the Bonds* encouraged a conflation of the paternalistic developmental goals of Peace Corps service with both gendered personal development and success in heteronormative pursuits, each of which are promised to volunteers by the novel and other Peace Corps promotions.

Taking this advertising techniques into account, it appears at least likely that the Peace Corps aimed to attract stereotypically gendered recruits. Further evidence in the affirmative should not be surprising. Presently, I offer two

examples of Kennedian archetypal male volunteers and the story of what happened when women broke the archetype prescribed to them.

I call *Breaking the Bonds* "Peace Corps promotional material" not just because Shriver validated it by writing its forward and maintaining that it was "a sensitive portrayal what it means to be a Volunteer," but because he indicates that the book functions as a recruiting tool; according to Shriver, "Miss Spencer's fine presentation of Peace Corps service as a rewarding personal experience will certainly encourage young people to give careful consideration to volunteering for the Peace Corps."

Kennedy was a known fan of the lessons articulated in The Ugly American. According to its authors, the least ugly American male archetypes included Homer Atkins and Colonel Hillandale; respectively, The Good Husband and The Rugged Individualist (or The Adventurer). Paul Cowan was a real-life "good husband," even though he came to be committed to the controversial political task of disrupting the Peace Corps. He eventually accomplished this through open revolt. He thought one reason it took so long to disrupt the system, though, was because he was such a desirable recruit. Speaking of he and his wife, he wrote, "We…passed…as the cheerful, faithful young missionary types that the Peace Corps has in mind when it recruits what it calls "married couples" to lend the organization stability."

Contrary to domesticated Cowan, Moritz Thomsen was a real-life Adventurer. According to Thomsen, "The Peace Corps exists as a vehicle for acting out your fantasies of brotherhood and, if you are strong enough, turning the dream into reality."

The Ugly American presented held only one woman in regard: Emma Atkins, doting wife of Homer. We might suspect that the only appropriate role for women in the Peace Corps was as wives. Indeed, several articles in "Peace Corps Volunteer" magazine pointed out problems common to unmarried women in the Peace Corps. Consider the following three emblematic situations. First, single females could be mere distractions for single males. "The physical message of sexual promise this [female] Volunteer conveyed to another (sic) male Volunteer was so great compared to the reality of fulfillment, that this frustration, perhaps combined with cultural shock and other factors, rendered the male Volunteer completely unfit for effective work in Peru," states the [Cornell Peru Report].

On the other hand, they could just be plain unpleasant to look at. She came on like an Israeli tank…but what is the female Volunteer really like? Is it true that she is "hard, overbearing, aggressive, independent and unwomanly," as one male put it? Either way, they were a threat to the organization. "We should never permit single girls to be placed in rural sites…some land reform agencies have expressed a preference for married couples living and working in colonization projects.…there are some fairly dramatic implications to this strategy. It

means cutting down on single women in Latin American countries, which will inevitably mean turning down female applicants."

We can deduce minimally that female recruits were better off married. We might conjecture that lesbian and single women were less likely to join and/or be accepted into the Corps. Regardless of the professed desires of volunteers, though, foreign country nationals simply were "developed" according to heteronormative, gendered principles. For example, Thomsen (The Adventurer) promoted high-risk activities for those he would paternalistically try to train as the "potential leaders" of the village. He thinks he has to teach them, or at least be patient while they try to learn, for example, "how to act in a meeting."

In truth, the townspeople act just like anyone acts in meetings. Though he claimed that "no one [in Rio Verde] wanted to be a boss - or to be bossed, for that matter," Thomsen "knows" this is foolish. In his words, "They just need help until the hens start laying; then they can walk by hemselves." "[I]f the people were capable of working together, there would be no need of a Peace Corps Volunteer." Thomsen's organizational strategy speaks to his own confidence in the American, rugged individualist model for success (the kind of model he was using when he suggested that the Peace Corps could fulfill his adventure fantasies "if he was strong enough").

His goals became host country nationals' goals, at their expense. A victorious corn crop might stand as a symbol of "status and the open mind. As a Volunteer, you are oriented toward this kind of success; you want it desperately, unashamedly." He admitted that he "was asking people to risk more than they had in a project that, if it failed, would complicate their lives." For example, he pressured Ramon, a new farmer, almost to Ramon's wit's end. Their failures were like his failures: when Thomsen was embarrassed by some shortcoming of the villagers, it as the embarrassment "perhaps [of] a father whose child fouls himself in public." At the same time, Thomsen is so proud of his own heroic battle with hunger that he decides the men he is working with are heroes. "[P]rojecting my own lethargy, exhaustion, and mental depression onto my friends, … who went through this seasonal hunger every year of their lives, I began to see in them such qualities of heroism and endurance, such a wild and savage strength, that it about broke my heart with pride for them."

Since Thomsen had a hard time empathizing with the difficulties of Rio Verdean men until he himself was fully taxed, it is not surprising that he virtually ignored village women. This is puzzling, considering that Thomsen thought of Rio Verde society as matriarchal. This was an inaccuracy; still, the effect of ignoring women was to promote patriarchal gender relations among the citizens of Rio Verde.

Sadly, paternalism was a critical feature of Kennedy's foreign policy, of which the Peace Corps was simply one component. Peace Corps policy did reflect the attitude that volunteers knew what was good for host country nationals; thus, emboldened by this attitude, volunteers tended to project their own

ideals onto host country nationals. Furthermore, Peace Corps public relations, like Shriver's endorsement of Breaking the Bonds, promised potential volunteers success in heteronormative pursuits. It is likely, then, that the early Peace Corps attracted recruits who conflated Peace Corps service with their own gendered development - in the manner of Thomsen, who was guided more by his own sense of adventure and desire for heroism then his love of Rio Verdeans. In real life, volunteers either encouraged the development of sexist hierarchy among host country nationals, or dropped or were kicked out. Objections to this posture can be raised. For example, not once have I sited a directive called explicitly for the promotion of heteronormativity in Peace Corps host countries, though I could have. My aim was to shine light on the "unofficial" ethos permeated the early Corps; heteronormativity, as a cornerstone of the behemoth that is sexism, is a slippery, inexact phenomenon. It often passes as "just life." Life would be different had Kennedy supported what Vietnam wanted for its own future: By Vietnam, For Vietnam! Imagine Peace Corps directives calling for gender equality among volunteers and the prioritization of women's issues in host countries. Those are compelling images. Contrasting them with the reality of early Peace Corps policy, propaganda, and practice, we can legitimize our suspicions that the paternalism and heteronormativism of the early Corps made things more difficult for volunteers and host country nationals who hoped to avoid those trappings on the path to decolonized freedom.

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An Interview With Phyllis Barber

Jessica Eldredge

Whether with toe-shoes or the typewriter, Phyllis Barber has been an artist from her earliest memories. As a child, she tapped out ditties on the piano to a rapt audience of aunts, uncles, cousins, and a grandfather. In high school she danced her way into the heart of Las Vegas as a Rhythmette, and later joined the Board of Directors of the Utah Symphony. Now, her writing touches readers with its portrayals of life as a woman in a Mormon community. She has won many awards, including Special Mention in the Pushcart Prize for "Wild Sage." She is also a member of the Nevada Writer's Hall of Fame, and won the Associated Writing Program Award for Creative Nonfiction for her book *How I Got Cultured*, which also won the Association of Mormon Letters Award. She is the author of two children's books, *Smiley Snake's Adventure* and *Legs: The Story of a Giraffe*; two short story collections, *The School of Love*, and *Parting the Veil: Stories from a Mormon Imagination*; a novel called *And the Desert Shall Blossom*; and a memoir, *How I Got Cultured: A Nevada Memoir*. The University of Nevada Press will release another memoir, *Raw Edges*, later in 2009.

As a faculty member at the MFA in Writing Program at Vermont College, she received the 1999 Louise Crowley & Roger Weingarten Award for Excellence in Teaching. She lives in Denver, Colorado near her three sons, and thinks being a grandmother "rocks"!

-- J.E.

Watermark: In *How I Got Cultured: A Nevada Memoir,* you describe your beginnings as a dancer and concert pianist. Could you tell me a little bit about your early education in regards to writing? When did you first get interested in telling stories? How did that play in to your Mormon upbringing?

Phyllis Barber: When I was six years old, I wrote mini-newspapers for the neighborhood. I would go and collect stories from the neighbors and put them

into a very abbreviated, hand-written newspaper that I delivered to maybe three houses. My father always wanted to be a writer, so the idea of writing was firmly implanted in my consciousness from a young age. In addition to this, he and his brother were great story tellers, and they often told the same old stories over and over which all of us children loved. "Tell it again, Daddy. Please." The favorite was "The Flying Pig," a story he had concocted about a WWII porker who saved the Americans from "the Japs." He also took us to the library every two weeks and encouraged us to read, read, read. He had moved from pillar to post as a boy, and the librarian in each new town was always his first friend.

I always wrote letters from an early age, so writing was something that seemed second nature to me. I also took some excellent English classes in high school where we wrote a great deal. The adviser of the school literary magazine asked for one of my essays for the literary journal (if I would revise it just a bit), and I couldn't be bothered with revision at the time. I also took some creative writing classes at BYU, but got in over my head early on with upper division classes and became discouraged when I didn't have the best story in the class. (Always that ego.) But always, I had it in the back of my mind that I would write someday, even if the idea of becoming a concert pianist was uppermost in my mind until three sons and the age of thirty.

As for the connection to my Mormon upbringing, I think I was most affected by the "sermon mentality," in that when I wrote stories or essays, I always felt the obligation to make sure they meant something, that they had "meaning." This has been both a bane and a blessing in my work.

WM: You seem intent on bringing the female Mormon experience to the foreground. Your themes often center on the tension between strict Mormon standards and the temptations of a temporal world. I wonder if you would comment on any conflict between your need to speak the truth about your life and the values ingrained in you by your religion.

PB: I've spent a lot of time trying to figure out why I was always drawn to "the bigger world" outside of Mormonism--maybe because my home life, though very supportive and nurturing, basically seemed a bit on the drab, even demanding, side to me. It could be that was because I fancied myself as being bigger than that life--ultimately an egotistical thing on my part, I realize. Nevertheless, I always felt a pull from the great wash of life which I witnessed daily in Las Vegas, Nevada. This played games with my sense of narrow as opposed to realistic interpretations of the world around me. I had a great love for my mother as well as a great resistance to her literal interpretation of Mormonism. She discouraged questions as she felt they were not supportive of the church authorities, and I was born with questions in my mouth. So, there was always a conflict, mostly a good-natured one, but when I began to tell stories, I could allow my characters to have other ideas, emotions and a place to be heard

rather than quieted into submission.

WM: Are there other Mormon writers you admire?

PB: This is always a tricky question because I will invariably leave someone out, and I haven't read every Mormon writer writing today. I, of course, admire Maureen Whipple, Juanita Brooks and Virginia Sorenson. Currently, there's Margaret Young, Bruce Jorgensen, Eugene England, Susan Howe, Holly Welker, Judith Freeman, Brian Evenson (I know I'm forgetting some very good writers. Forgive me....)

WM: You write in a wide range of genres: memoir, short story, children's lit, and the novel. Do you find it difficult to jump between the genres? When you sit down to write a story, do you select a form first, or does the form derive from early drafts of an idea? (Do you say, for instance, "I think it's time to write a novel"?)

PB: The truth is that I first wanted to be a children's writer, then discovered that I needed to learn how to write before I could be the kind of children's writer that I wanted to be. Then, I probably would have chosen poetry, but other things interfered. I learned to write by writing feature articles for Utah Holiday magazine in Salt Lake City for about five years. Then, I decided to take classes at the University of Utah, and the challenge of writing fiction became of interest to me. I then enrolled in the Vermont College MFA in Writing Program, a low-residency program in Montpelier, Vermont. It was during those years that I wrote many of my short stories, some of which ultimately evolved into the book *How I Got Cultured: A Nevada Memoir*. I very much wanted to write my only novel, And the Desert Shall Blossom, because it dealt with the story of my grandparents in southern Nevada. I never knew my grandmother, so this book is truly a novel. I just based it on some stories I'd overheard as a child, and I very much wanted to know who my grandmother was through this process.

I basically write what occurs to me as important at the time. The most recent memoir, Raw Edges, was written from necessity. I had to figure out an extremely difficult period of my life. I wanted it to be a novel (actually a novoir, which was my idea of what the book really was), but it turned out that I could be more honest with myself in the memoir format.

WM: I've heard that *Raw Edges* took eight years to write. Could you give us some insight as to why this work took so much longer to complete than some of your other works?

PB: As I mentioned above, I had to write this book to figure out what had happened to me. I got myself in some very tight spots after a separation in

1994, then divorce from my marriage of 33 years in 1997, and one could say that I basically fell apart. I call this difficult period "my seven lean years." Maybe I needed to fall apart to put myself back together in a healthy fashion--that remains a question. It took many, many rewrites to gain some distance and to figure out in a detached way, what kinds of stories I'd been telling myself and ask how valid they actually were.

It was a long process of healing, but I believe it was tremendously influential in my return to balance-a necessary endeavor.

WM: Could you comment on your writing process? Do you deal with character, plot, and setting separately?

PB: Because I tend to be a very lyrical writer (I'm a professional musician, after all), I have to go back and create more tension in my work. My early drafts are often quite flat, so I see where my story is going (it leads me), and then beef it up where necessary. If the characters don't have enough life, I work with that aspect. If the setting is incomplete, I do what I call "depth charges" and rewrite until the setting has come to life. All rewriting is a matter of "mining for gold," and I rewrite many times to bring a story to life. Maybe, however, I'm a bit afraid I've gotten to the point where I rewrite too much and suck some of the life and spontaneity out of the work. It's possible, and I'd like to return to a more spontaneous style of generation.

WM: If you could give one piece of advice to beginning writers, what would it be and why?

PB: Never, never, never, never, never give up. Writing is HARD and LONELY work, but if that's what you want to do, just keep after it and give it your best. It is very rewarding to have written.

WM: What effect do you wish your writing to have on the larger world of literature? What do you wish to bring to the table, so to speak?

PB: In the beginning, I didn't want to be labeled a "Mormon writer." I wanted to be A Writer. Period. But I've gone past that sticking place and am more willing to be what I am. Mormonism was and is an integral part of my life, and when I've tried to deny it, it's always there, tapping me on the shoulder. So, what I hope to do is to build a bridge between Mormonism, which I consider a very intricate and complex theology (Christianity is a challenging way to live a life in the first place) and the rest of the world.

I think it deserves a place in our literature other than in the sometimes scandalous portrayals of polygamy and/or Mark Hoffman murders, etc. It is an important Western story that is often overlooked in all of the clichés, and I

ultimately think the culture, which is so easy to belittle, deserves better. This is not to say I'm on the missionary path. (I could be labeled a "pick-and-choose Mormon," in some ways, and I have questions about being "a true believer.") It means that I want to tell stories that speak closer to the yearning for goodness of many of the Mormon people (there are always the lemons, but I'm not the judge, to be sure) and of humanity in general.

I also want to reach a broader audience and be able to speak in a universal way that can be heard. I've always wanted to touch people's hearts (which I know sounds smarmy) as other literature has touched my heart and moved me to new places in myself. I want to be simple enough to be good, and believe I've hurt myself by being so in love with intricate language, structure, etc. It's a battle to find the right place from which to write and speak and to be read and heard.

LORDS
GUITAR
FLANGE
GARDEN